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**A Paper Commissioned by the John Fetzer Trust about  
Spiritualism, Spiritualist Camps, Camp Chesterfield, and  
Physical Phenomena**

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## **Epilogue**

### **A Paper Commissioned by the John Fetzer Trust about Spiritualism, Spiritualist Camps, Camp Chesterfield, and Physical Phenomena**

**Rev. Prof. Todd Jay Leonard**

## **Prologue**

Spanning a period of four decades, from 1934 through 1974, John Fetzer (1901-1991), a pioneer in broadcast radio in America and the owner of the Detroit Tigers, had more than a passing interest in spirituality, the paranormal, and the religion of Spiritualism. He frequently visited historic Camp Chesterfield, located outside of Anderson, Indiana, to receive spiritual guidance and spirit messages from loved ones and guides via a medium. “His interest in parapsychology and spirituality began at an early age, and he claimed to have had several spiritual experiences that influenced his later life. While spending a year bedridden with complications of influenza, he made this commitment, ‘If I am permitted to live, I will devote my life to the spiritual work of the Creator.’ For the next 73 years he did.” (Kalamazoo Public Library, 2016) This paper offers a detailed outline of the history of Spiritualism, circuit riders/camp meetings, physical phenomena, and Camp Chesterfield, referencing specifically the time period when John Fetzer actively attended Camp Chesterfield and sought the guidance and advice from mediums. In particular, he was attracted to the mediumship of Rev. Charles Swann and Rev. Lillian Dee Johnson.

### **1) A History of the Advent of Modern Spiritualism as a Movement and Religion**

The New World, and specifically the United States, has always been a place of refuge for those seeking religious freedom. Many immigrants chose to make the long trans-Atlantic journey in order to be able to practice their religion freely and without hindrance. Most of these newcomers, however, brought with them to their newfound home the religions they practiced, or some rendition of them, choosing to worship their own version as they saw fit.

What makes Modern Spiritualism unique in the testament of religious history in the United States is that it is one of three purely “American-made” religions that was eventually exported from (rather than imported to) the United States—the other two being

Mormonism and Christian Science. All three religions began during a time (and within mere decades of one another) that was witnessing an era of religious turmoil and fervor that had taken hold of people that resulted in old-fashioned Bible thumping, coupled with fire and brimstone revivals. Starting around 1800 and lasting through 1850, the area of Western, upstate New York around the Rochester region of the state became known as the “burned over district,” which occurred during the “Second Great Awakening.”

Charles Finney, in his autobiography written in 1876, coined the term “burned over district” to describe the religious climate of the day as being devoid of “fuel” (e.g. unconverted souls) left to “burn” (e.g. to convert new souls). Great social upheaval was happening during this time period that had people on edge: abolition, women’s suffrage, utopian societies, and other social experiments were disturbing the status quo that had been enjoyed for generations.

Western New York was still considered to be frontier land and churches and ministers were in short supply. Many of the established denominations of Christianity created innovative ways to reach out to potential adherents through “circuit riders” and eventually the “camp meeting.”

## **2) A Brief History of Circuit Riders and Camp Meetings**

The concept of evangelizing and spreading the gospel by means of a “camp meeting” became widespread around the United States in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as a way to bring “religion” to those living rurally on the frontier. As the United States grew, both demographically and geographically, camp meetings quickly gained favor amongst established religions as a way to minister directly to a larger number of souls in the shortest amount of time. Camp meetings grew out of the religious tradition of “revivals” which gained in popularity during the Second Great Awakening—the evangelical movement that was largely advanced by the Protestant religions of Methodism, Baptism, and Presbyterianism. The Western frontier offered much opportunity economically to early settlers, but it often meant people lived a life isolated from the civilized world. The Methodists were the first to create a system of “circuit riding”<sup>1</sup> that enabled people to have

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<sup>1</sup> It was the first Methodist Bishop in America, Reverend Francis Asbury, who came up with a solution to the perennial problem of getting ministers to the people who were scattered far and wide around the vast frontier. Reverend Asbury personally had travelled hundreds of thousands of miles ministering to people so naturally he developed the system called “circuit riding” where he dispatched men (whom he had ordained) to a predetermined circuit or territory. Often times it took weeks for a minister to make it to all the cabins in his assigned region, but along the way he would

some sort of religious life, if even fleetingly, when the circuit riding minister would visit their cabin on his normal rounds.

Circuit riders had to be young, in good health, and single (since marriage and a family forced preachers to settle in one area and leave the traveling ministry). Unlike their counterparts in other denominations, Methodist circuit riders did not have to have formal education. Leaders of the new church wanted educated, trained circuit riders, but they wanted even more to spread their ministry to people on the frontier who needed Christian guidance. (Jordan, 1998)



[Illustration 1: Watercolor by J. Maze Burbank, circa 1839; public domain]

Formal church buildings were quite scarce in the frontier regions with only larger cities with thriving communities being able to establish such churches. In order to combat this deficiency in the rural-religious “churchdom” of the wilderness, gradually a trend developed that incorporated the use of a large tent or crude structure which served as the center of a unique form of worship known as the “camp meeting.” Usually held in a central location, camp meetings allowed adherents from miles around to congregate and worship together. This changed the fabric of the American religious landscape profoundly.

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do the things that an ordained minister had to do: offer Christian burials to those who died, perform the sacrament of marriage to those who wanted to be married, baptize any recent converts, conduct services, and preach the gospel to families who were socially isolated from having any contact or opportunity to have any religious instruction. (Fleet, 1987)

Suddenly people had an opportunity to attend one of these meetings that not only offered them good, old-fashioned religion, but also a chance to socialize with others. These revival-like meetings were often emotionally charged affairs with sentimental appeals to God to be saved, resulting in the congregants flailing themselves around and to the ground as if possessed, asking for forgiveness with the promise of living a righteous life from that day forward.<sup>2</sup> Tens of thousands of people would attend these meetings over a period of weeks, with attendees staying anywhere from a few days to a week or more. Dozens of preachers would be moving about the throngs of people gathered, preaching and offering salvation to all those willing souls. (Fleet, 1987)

Not far off women were already beginning to find their places on the rude plank seats in front of the “stage.” They were leaving vacant a few seats in front. Those were the “anxious benches.” Here the “convicted” [those whom God had chosen for conversion] would come to be prayed for when the preacher issued the invitation for “mourners.” The only covering over the arbor sheltered the pulpit. On the stage was a knot of men solemnly shaking hands and conversing. On all sides of the arbor, row after row of vehicles [horse drawn wagons] crowded one another. Men were standing everywhere. The music struck up, quavering; mostly female voices singing two lines at a time as the deacon read them off. After another hymn, a preacher arose and the men came filing in, taking their seats on the opposite side of the arbor if the women had not filled them all; or crowding into the aisles and back of the seats occupied by their women folk. The minister, an ordinary looking man, dragged out an ordinary address while whispered conversations hummed louder and louder. Infants wailed fretfully. A dog fight started somewhere among the wagons.

At length the evangelist arose. At once the congregation was electrified. “And what come ye out into the wilderness for to see?” he asked, fixing his eyes upon the congregation. His voice rose powerfully, “Ayr! Ye are come as a holiday pageant, bedecked in tinsel and costly raiment. I see before me the pride of beauty and youth; the middle-aged...the hoary hairs and decrepit limbs of age; —all trampling—hustling each other in your haste—on the beaten road—the way to death and judgment! Oh! Fools and blind! Slow-worms, battenning upon the damps and filth of this vile earth! Hugging your muck rakes while the Glorious One proffers you the Crown of Life!” Women were in tears. “That’s preaching!” shouted a gray-haired man. “Lord have mercy!” another besought. (Johnson, 392)

It was from this tradition of Methodist-based camp meetings that the Spiritualist movement borrowed the basic concepts, and adopted certain components, to create its own version

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<sup>2</sup> See Illustration 1.

of a mass gathering of the faithful in order to experience and share in the belief system. A major and key difference, however, involved the giving of messages from the departed to the living. A Spiritualist camp meeting basically functioned in a similar fashion, but instead of fire and brimstone sermons, people were regaled with short lectures (often based on scripture) and a “message service” where mediums would stand on a raised platform in order to give to those in attendance mediumistic messages from friends and loved ones in Spirit.

### **3) The Beginnings of the Spiritualist Movement in the United States<sup>3</sup>**

In order to understand more concretely how the Spiritualist movement began, which eventually led to the adaptation of camp meeting-style services, it is important to revisit briefly its colorful history and unique beginnings. March 31, 2016 marked the 168<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the advent of the American-made religion of Modern Spiritualism.<sup>4</sup> More than a date on a calendar, it is a surprising testimonial of endurance and perseverance for a movement that seemingly began as an accident with quite humble, if not obscure, beginnings. It was on March 31, 1848, when two young sisters—Katie and Maggie Fox—began to receive intelligent responses from an unknown entity that had been vexing the Fox family since moving into their new home. The modest, two-story cottage<sup>5</sup> in Hydesville, New York had been plagued by a series of rappings that were especially noticeable at night, causing the family to become quite fatigued and weary from a lack of sleep.

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<sup>3</sup> A portion of the information contained in this section has been adapted, in part, from an earlier paper entitled “Women of Substance: The Fox Sisters—Influential Voices of the Spiritualist Movement in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America” (pp.81-85).

<sup>4</sup> The date of March 31<sup>st</sup> was adopted as the official anniversary of the advent of Modern Spiritualism in 1870 at the national convention for Spiritualism in the form of a resolution which read: “Whereas Spiritualism has become a power in the land and may be deemed the great growing religious idea of the country; and, It is well to revert to the time of small beginnings and hold in remembrance the first pioneers in this Spiritual movement; therefore, ‘Resolved, that this convention recommend to all State conventions and local societies to make the time of the appearance of the Hydesville rappings an anniversary day, the services of that day to be conducted in each locality as may be deemed most practical.” (History of Spiritualism”, *National Spiritualist Association of Churches Official Website*, retrieved on January 7, 2016.) Hence, March 31<sup>st</sup> is generally accepted as the anniversary of the movement which eventually became the religion, philosophy and science of Spiritualism.

<sup>5</sup> The original cottage no longer exists. The original foundation in Hydesville, New York (now called Newark, New York) is now a shrine dedicated to the birthplace of Modern Spiritualism called “Hydesville Memorial Park.” It consists of an outer building featuring large windows to view the stones that made up the cottage’s original foundation. In 1915 the cottage was moved from Wayne County (in upstate New York) to Lily Dale (the headquarters for the *National Spiritualist Association of Churches* (NSAC)) where it remained for nearly forty years until it burned down under suspicious circumstances on September 21, 1955. [See Illustrations 2-4.]

(Goldsmith, 28) It was on this night, however, the eve of “April Fool’s Day,” that the girls decided to test the disincarnate spirit by commanding the entity to mimic their actions.

Ostensibly, with a bit of effort and ingenuity, Katie and Maggie conversed with the entity by developing a simple code using handclapping that corresponded to “yes” and “no” questions and numbers.

Together, Mrs. Fox and her daughters began to ask questions. Mrs. Fox first asked the mystery rapper to count to ten—it did. She then asked the spirit to reveal the ages of her daughters—it gave a rap for each of the girl’s age correctly. She asked if it was a human being making these rapping noises—there was no answer. She then asked it to make two raps if it was a spirit—it did. She continued by asking if the spirit had been injured in their home—this question followed with two raps. (Leonard 1, 27)



[Illustration 2: Original Fox Cottage, Hydesville, New York; public domain.]

Affectionately, the two sisters began calling the unknown spirit “Mr. Split-foot.”<sup>6</sup> (Melton, 94) Not nearly as enamored with this unwanted visitor as her daughters, an alarmed Mrs. Margaret Fox asked her husband to come witness what was transpiring. The always pragmatic and rational Mr. John Fox initially felt that a simple explanation would solve the mystery, but after being taunted by the raps that seemed to originate in all corners of the room, the ceiling, and from the floor, he, too, was bewildered and stumped to find any logical reason for the rappings.

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<sup>6</sup> This nickname most likely is in reference to the Devil, as Satan is often depicted as a creature with “hoofed” or “split” feet. This was a common Victorian reference to the Devil during this time period.

Determined to get to the bottom of the supernatural conundrum plaguing her family, Mrs. Fox then summoned friends and neighbors to enter their home to serve as witnesses to the otherworldly occurrence that had all of them not only nervous wrecks, but bewitched by what it could mean. With the help of their concerned neighbors, the Foxes eventually developed a code that matched the number of raps to letters in the alphabet. Albeit time-consuming, they were able to discern that the spirit's name was Charles B. Rosna and that he had been murdered in that house some years previously and his remains were buried in the cellar.<sup>7</sup> (Jackson, 4)

Several far-reaching features emerged from those initial rappings: 1) it was proven that communication that was intelligible could be made with spirits; 2) certain people, like the Fox sisters, were naturally gifted with the ability to make this communication; and 3) communication could be facilitated by means of a code. The events on this night started a movement of the likes the world had never seen before. Soon, people from all over were flocking to the Fox cottage to witness this supernatural phenomenon. The birth of [modern] psychic mediumship, and some time later, the religion known as Spiritualism, had begun. (Leonard 1, 28)

Literally overnight, word of the “Hydesville Rappings” spread far and wide, with the news eventually reaching Katie and Maggie’s older sister, Mrs. Leah Fish, in Rochester, New York in May of 1848. She immediately returned to Hydesville upon learning about the manifestations in her parents’ home. Leah was very quick to appreciate that the story and the surrounding publicity it generated had great potential for profit. In short order, Leah turned her sisters’ abilities to talk with the dead into a stage act. She soon became the *raison d’etre* for what would become a new religious movement, managing the girls rigidly, forcing them to give non-stop readings, requiring them to hold public demonstrations, and, of course, pressuring them to lead séances. Mrs. Fish soon realized that she, too, had the “gift” and was quite anxious to get in on the act. Before long, after news of the Fox sisters’ mediumship ability became well known, a number of “intuitives” began to claim similar abilities. In a few short years, millions of people claimed to be adherents of the new religion of Spiritualism.

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<sup>7</sup> It was purported, and subsequently became a part of historical record, that when the Fox cottage’s cellar was eventually excavated, indeed human teeth, hair, and bones were discovered there. It was not until some fifty-six years later, however, that the further discovery of a complete human skeleton was found in the cellar of the cottage that seemed to prove the story of a peddler being murdered in the house. These collaborating facts were reported in the *Boston Journal* (a non-Spiritualistic newspaper) on November 23, 1904. (Doyle, 73; Stuart, 17)





[Illustration 3: Hydesville Memorial Park, Newark, New York; photo taken June 2015.]

...in 1854, the New England Spiritualists Association estimated the number of spiritualists<sup>8</sup> in the United States as 2 million, and the *North American Review* gave its opinion that that figure was reasonable. *The Spiritual Register*, a popular annual serial compiled by spiritualists, estimated the number of spiritualists in 1860 as 1,600,000 but suggested that the number of nominal believers was 5 million.<sup>9</sup> (Buescher, x)

Spiritualism, unlike most religions that have a prescribed belief system to which their followers adhere and practice faithfully, was more experiential in that one was regarded

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<sup>8</sup> Some authors and researchers denote Spiritualism and Spiritualists in the lower-case. As a religion, however, similar to Christianity, Judaism, or Islam, it is the opinion of this researcher that these terms should be capitalized; even denominations within a religion (*i.e.* Christianity—such as Presbyterian, Baptist or Episcopalian) consistently regard these as proper nouns and are hence capitalized. For the purposes of this study, unless directly quoted from another source, the words Spiritualism and Spiritualist will be capitalized.

<sup>9</sup> The term “nominal believers” refers to those who may have not fully embraced Spiritualism as a religion, but were quite happy to attend Spiritualist camp meetings, séances, and to receive readings from Spiritualist mediums. Historically, it has been difficult to ascertain an exact number of adherents to Spiritualism at any given time because many people throughout its history have publicly embraced a more mainstream, traditional religion, but practiced Spiritualism as a secondary religion (often secretly) due to the turmoil association to Spiritualism would cause them personally from family, friends, and the community. This bias is still true today among many Spiritualists. Certainly, John Fetzer could also be classified into his category as he was quite happy to visit Camp Chesterfield and attend séances in order to receive messages and readings from mediums, but he was very secretive about his interest in Spiritualism and the paranormal due to his very public persona and high position and place in society. Word of his interest and belief in Spiritualism and mediumship could have tarnished his reputation in the circles in which he worked professionally and socialized. He likely would have been skewered in the press and harshly criticized by his more mainstream and conservative business associates.

as a Spiritualist “simply by trying the spirits and being encouraged by the results.” (Buescher, xi)

Of course, Spiritualism (as a religion) offered an alternative to the stodgy belief systems that were prevalent at the time. In particular, it advocated the redemption of all souls (no matter how sinful the person was in life); the negation of heaven and hell as locations (maintaining that they are merely conditions, and both can be earthbound); the denial of original sin (children have enough opportunity in life to stray from a moral path, without being tainted from the moment they are born due to the actions of Adam and Eve); the rejection of the belief in vicarious atonement (preferring to believe that each person has a personal responsibility to atone for sins committed, rather than depending upon salvation through the death on the cross of Jesus); the belief that Jesus, The Christ, was a gifted healer, teacher and psychic (but was no more divine or the son of God than any other avatar or living person); the interpretation of the Resurrection of Jesus as being in spirit-form (and not of the physical body); and the belief that women are as capable of doing God’s work as men.



[Illustration 4: Original foundation of the Fox Cottage; photo taken June 2015.]

In a relatively short amount of time, then, the Spiritualist movement began to attract a large number of adherents and without proper churches or gathering places in those early years, the idea of “camp meetings” took hold and groups of like-minded people began to gather to share Spiritualist ideas and to allow mediums an opportunity to meet and give messages to a larger number of people at one time.

The first 50-year cycle continued bearing the weight of establishing a strong foundation for the new movement. Mediumship as displayed by the Fox Sisters became popular throughout the country. The leaders of the day recognized Spiritualism as a philosophy that could change the world. In fact, it was taken to England just four years after its inception. From there, its journey around the world began. Meanwhile, meetings were held in halls in many major cities of the northeastern United States. The philosophers drew large crowds who listened to their oratories. Soon, they could no longer find halls large enough to house the crowds. The answer to the dilemma was to begin open-air grove meetings. (2 Awtry, p. 7)

[The ex-Methodists] suggested to the Spiritualists that it would be a way to serve the multitude that steadily increased in number. The leadership of Spiritualism [initially] looked at this grove meeting idea with deep suspicion. After much thought, they decided to implement it as an all day camp meeting. They expounded on how this new camp meeting should be different than the old Methodist grove meetings. Apart from the séance or picnics, it was based loosely on the lyceum movement. At first the speakers were quite comfortable with the Bible preaching. They treated Spiritualism as a kind of purified Christianity. At this time, the Spiritualists were religionists, liberals, and rationalists. This camp meeting style gave birth to the first Spiritualist Camp at Pierpont Grove, Malden, Massachusetts, in 1866; named after John Pierpont. In 1870, another camp was founded at Lake Pleasant, Massachusetts. Soon camps began to sprout up throughout New England, New York, Wisconsin, Iowa, Florida and westward to the Pacific coast. (2 Awtry, pp. 23-24)<sup>10</sup>

Initially, many camp meetings were held on the land of people sympathetic to the movement who offered the use of their property. The widespread popularity of these camp meetings eventually necessitated the purchase of land to construct a permanent campground for Spiritualists to use during high season (June through September, usually). As these camps began to take shape around the nation, associations were formed that allowed attendees to become members.

In the very beginning, canvas tents were used at these camp meetings by the mediums and attendees; hay for horses had to be brought by the people as well as firewood to cook. (Harrison, et al. p. 19) As these gatherings became more and more popular, actual land needed to be purchased in order to accommodate the thousands of people who came from far and wide to attend a Spiritualist camp meeting. Mediums sometimes made a wooden floor in their tents to make it sturdier, which eventually led to walls being added,

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<sup>10</sup> Three of the earliest Spiritualist camps in the United States were established in Maine: Camp Etna (1876), Madison Camp (1879), and Temple Heights Spiritualist Association (1882).

making the structure a rustic shack. Gradually, these crude dwellings became more permanent and the shanty was born which allowed mediums a more permanent place to hold séances and to live during the camp season.

In the ensuing years after the first Spiritualist camp was founded, dozens and dozens of Spiritualist camps sprang up all over the United States. Largely summer gatherings, these camps maintained a vibrant following and were quite active—especially during and after major wars—throughout the twentieth century. A number of these grew to a size where they became year-round camps, sponsoring churches and services throughout the calendar year with many activities and events organized for members and regular attendees. Today, there are roughly only 20 camps around the United States (with a number of these inactive as of the writing of this paper).

#### **4) Spiritualism as a Religion**

Spiritualism, as a religion, is really no different than most other religions except that its adherents believe that people do not die—bodies do—and after death, kin and acquaintances are able to communicate with those left behind through a sensitive called a “medium.” Spiritualist church services feature mediums that offer “messages” from loved ones on the other side to those in attendance. This is in addition to a sermon and songs that most people raised in a Christian tradition would readily recognize.

Initially, when Spiritualism began to draw huge numbers of members from other more mainstream churches, it was unfairly labeled as being a form of witchcraft or satanic worship by those which felt threatened by its claims (and those who had a vested interest in keeping memberships in their own churches high).<sup>11</sup> The reality is: Spiritualism is a God-centered religion, accepting the sacred truths from all religious traditions, including

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<sup>11</sup> In 1854, a petition with 15,000 signatures was presented to the U.S. Congress demanding a scientific committee be formed to investigate Spiritualism and its otherworldly phenomena. “Lawmakers ultimately tabled the petition, even as a new debate raged among the nation’s clergy. Many clergymen became alarmed on June 10 [1854] when former Wisconsin governor Nathaniel P. Tallmadge became a charter member of the Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge. ‘Your pulpits—and we speak kindly when we speak of them, for they have holy office...have launched forth invectives. The cry of delusion and chicanery has been heard all over the land.... Policy was adopted...not only from the pulpits, but by the religious press of this country, namely that evil spirits have visited the earth still further to delude deluded mortals. What pity! ...It is very strange, if they believe this thing—that evil spirits can come to do evil on their earth—that good spirits will not be permitted by the good God also to come upon this earth to effect good purposes.” (Stuart, 176-177) Also, Tallmadge was a dear and old friend of Maggie Fox, a founder of Spiritualism, who was constantly being accused of everything from humbuggery to satanic witchcraft.

Christianity,<sup>12</sup> and is in no way connected to black magic or devil worship. This, however, does not mean that Spiritualism is welcomed with open arms within the larger religious community.

Even with religious freedom and diversity being a hallmark of American ideals and values, many mainstream religions look at Spiritualism askance, often regarding it disdainfully—similar to the way a wayward relative who does not fit the social norm is outcast as a black sheep within a family. The fact remains, however, that the Spiritualist movement (and later religion) has survived for well over a century-and-a-half and is still continuing despite the negative reception it has traditionally received by mainstream denominations (outlasting other religious movements, some of which are long defunct).

## 5) Historic Camp Chesterfield

Since 1886, Spiritualism has been a visible part of Indiana's rich and varied religious historical landscape through the auspices of the *Indiana Association of Spiritualists* (IAOS), settling permanently on the banks of the White River in the small town of Chesterfield, Indiana officially in 1890. Affectionately called "Camp Chesterfield" by its members, this association has been a "spiritual center of light" for generations of Hoosiers.

A number of religious groups during the 19<sup>th</sup> century took advantage of Indiana's frontier spirit by choosing to settle there.

In the 1830s, most religious organizations in Indiana were imported units filled with new arrivals from somewhere else. Furthermore, probably more churches were founded by the influence of missionaries than grew up spontaneously from woodland cabins. For the year 1836, there were 319 congregations throughout an eighteen county area of Indiana. Most of these met in private homes, barns, schools, or outside; less than half had regular church buildings for worship. Of the 319 churches, 118 were

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<sup>12</sup> Spiritualist ministers and mediums often use scripture from the *Holy Bible* in sermons for worship services. An often-quoted scripture that refers to "spirit gifts" comes from 1 Corinthians 12 (the following is from the *Good News Bible version*) verses 4-11: "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served. There are different abilities to perform service, but the same God gives ability to everyone for their particular service. The Spirit's presence is shown in some way to each person for the good of all. The Spirit gives one person a message full of wisdom while to another the same Spirit gives a message full of knowledge. One and the same Spirit gives faith to one person, while to another person he gives the power to heal. The Spirit gives one person the power to work miracles, to another, the gift of speaking God's message; and to yet another, the ability to tell the difference between gifts, which come from the Spirit and those that do not. To one person he gives the ability to speak in strange tongues, and to another he gives the ability to explain what is said. But is the one and the same Spirit who does all this; as he wishes, he gives a different gift to each person."

Methodist groups, which evolved from a larger number of informal classes. Baptists had organized 75 congregations, the Disciples of Christ 42, Presbyterians 39, Friends 24, and United Brethren 11; there were 10 other miscellaneous groups. (Vanderstel, 2009)

These congregations set the stage, in essence, for what was about to occur on Indiana's religious vista. After the Spiritualist movement first began, it was not long until the movement spread far and wide, including its arrival to the borders of Indiana. For a number of years, there was no specific association in the state devoted to the religion of Spiritualism. Hoosier adherents were forced to travel to Ohio, Michigan or Illinois to attend "camp" meetings modeled on those made popular earlier by Methodist preachers who would travel as itinerant ministers to different parts of the country to preach, convert, marry, baptize, and even bury those in need of "ministering."

Similarly to mainstream denominations, in the beginning years of the Spiritualist movement, regular church meetings were conducted in people's homes, in public spaces, outdoors and eventually centered on a revival-type of tent meeting where people would go to hear messages, receive readings, and attend séances. Gradually, these tent services began to take the form of "camps" where people could go for several days or weeks to "camp out" in order to attend the services. Eventually, these tents began to take the form of rustic cottages where mediums would reside during the "high" season, from June through September.

This is exactly how Camp Chesterfield began. After attending a Spiritualist camp in Michigan, Hoosiers John and Mary Ellen Bussel-Westerfield of Anderson felt that Indiana needed its very own Spiritualist camp, so they organized the first meeting of the *Indiana Association of Spiritualists* in 1886. Interest in this newfangled religion spread quickly, and in 1890, a permanent home was made after the association purchased a sizeable parcel of wooded land on the banks of the White River in Chesterfield, Indiana. The year 1891 marks the first real meeting on the grounds for the *Indiana Association of Spiritualists*. Camp Chesterfield is one of three of the most historically significant centers for Spiritualism in the United States (the other two being Camp Lily Dale in New York and Camp Cassadaga in Florida).



[Illustration 5: The Sunflower Hotel in its early years. Note the added “spirit” images around the subjects. Photo courtesy of *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.]

Today, Camp Chesterfield is a thriving Spiritualist community that supports a number of buildings that are historically significant.<sup>13</sup> Upon entering its gates, the visitor to Camp Chesterfield is greeted by a nostalgic old hotel called “The Sunflower.”<sup>14</sup> It is reminiscent of something out of a John Steinbeck novel—the front porch, with its wicker rockers, allows one to be easily transported back in time to a bygone era. Another hotel on the grounds, “The Western,” built in the style of a 1940s roadhouse, is unique because of its authentic exterior and charming interior.<sup>15</sup> It boasts the distinction of being the first “fireproof” building in the state of Indiana, constructed out of thick concrete and covered with red bricks. (Hattaway, 2010)

Both of these historic hotels offer visitors an opportunity to go back in time, imagining how guests would have sat idly on the shaded porches—most likely escaping the hot Indiana summer sun—chatting to one another about the messages they received from their loved ones through one of the well-known resident mediums who lived in one of the many historic cottages around the perimeter of the camp.

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<sup>13</sup> Camp Chesterfield is officially recognized as an historic landmark district, listed on the U.S. Park Service’s *National Register of Historic Places* [Listed July 26, 2002] ([www.nps.gov/history/nr/listings/20020726.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/listings/20020726.htm))

<sup>14</sup> See Illustrations 5-7.

<sup>15</sup> See Illustration 8.



## 6) The Early Years

Early Hoosier Spiritualists were quite forward thinking and were involved in the free and progressive thought movements of the day. These people were very attracted to the idea of Spiritualism which advocated equality for women, Abolition, and the general negation of firmly held concepts of mainstream religion such as original sin, hell and damnation of wayward souls,<sup>16</sup> vicarious atonement<sup>17</sup> and the absolute divinity of Jesus,<sup>18</sup> The Christed One.



[Illustration 6: The Sunflower Hotel in the early years. Photo courtesy of the *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.]

Dr. J.W. Westerfield, and his wife Mary, of Anderson, Indiana were two such people who actively sought out alternative ideas regarding politics and religion. In 1883, Dr. Westerfield offered a second floor room in the hall he owned (which also housed his

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<sup>16</sup> Spiritualists believe strongly in the concept that all souls are redeemable, no matter how wickedly they behaved during their earthly incarnation. Also, the idea of “heaven” and “hell” being locations is not a belief of Spiritualists; instead, Spiritualists view the concept of “heaven” and “hell” as conditions, with humans creating their own earthly “heavens” and “hells” according to how they live their lives during this particular incarnation.

<sup>17</sup> The Christian belief that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the forgiveness of sins of humankind is contrary to Spiritualist teachings which focus on inculcating the ideology that each person is morally responsible for his or her own transgressions on earth and must make amends for those when on the other side.

<sup>18</sup> Spiritualists view the historical Jesus as a wonderfully gifted Master-Teacher, healer and psychic, who attained the “Christed” state as a result of his good works and teachings while on the earth plane. He is no more divine, however, than any other person before, during or after his earthly existence—all humans equally have the divine spark of God within them.



drugstore on the first floor) in downtown Anderson to act as a general meeting place for the intellectuals who resided in the area.



[Illustration 7: Inside the lobby area of the Sunflower Hotel, circa 1940s. Photo courtesy of the Hett Art Gallery and Museum, Camp Chesterfield.]

According to the book, *Chesterfield Lives—1886-1986—Our First Hundred Years*, Dr. Westerfield was instrumental in the formation of the “Indiana Association of Spiritualists” and subsequently, Camp Chesterfield. It was during a trip to Michigan that he and his wife came up with the idea of forming an association in Indiana. At that time, Michigan had three functioning Spiritualist camps, but the journey to Michigan was long and arduous. Dr. Westerfield purportedly suggested (while attending Frazer’s Grove Spiritualist Camp, near Vicksburg, Michigan) that Indiana should have its own camp. Other Hoosiers who had also travelled to Michigan agreed with his proposal and the seeds that would later become the *Indiana Association of Spiritualists* were sown.

It was further decided that Dr. Westerfield was the only one in their number in a position to enter into the preliminaries of the plan, as he had already retired from business and had the necessary means, ability and time to carry through on the matter.

In the next three years, he contacted Spiritualists in all parts of the state, reporting his progress concerning an Indiana Camp and also progress

within the movement itself, and in the early fall of 1886 he called a mass meeting in his Hall in Anderson.

When all had assembled, and Dr. Westerfield had rapped his gavel for order, there were about two hundred men and women in attendance, many of whom manifested deep interest and took an active part in the deliberations. Dr. George Hilligoss was elected president; his wife, Caroline, secretary; and Carroll Bronnenberg, treasurer. (Harrison, *et al*, 10)



[Illustration 8: Western Hotel, Camp Chesterfield; [photo by author.]

For three years, the association met at Dr. Westerfield's hall in Anderson. "During that time, on November 5, 1887, they drew up the Constitution and By Laws making the society an incorporated body, legally qualified to transact all business pertaining to the organization and the religion of Spiritualism." (Harrison, *et al*, 14) The next order of business was to find a permanent home for the association. Dr. Westerfield, in the meantime, was elected president of the association. He served one term and was succeeded by Dr. L.M. Blackledge, the association's third president.

The annual convention of 1890 saw Dr. Westerfield again elected as the fourth president of the association. The convention was held at a church

picnic on the Carroll and Emily Bronnenberg riverside property at Chesterfield. This was an amicable and generous gesture on their part, and was an outgrowth of the original membership of Carroll, Henry and Fred Bronnenberg in 1886. (Harrison, *et al*, 14)

The grounds, with rolling hills and valleys, fresh spring water, and ample forest, were previously revered by the Native Americans who had once inhabited the area. In fact, not far from this acreage are ten distinct "earthworks" built by a group of prehistoric Indians known as the Adena-Hopewell people. (Werner, 121) Spiritualism, since its earliest beginnings, has had an affinity with Native American culture. Many Spiritualist adherents have a Native American guide within their band of Spirit Guides.<sup>19</sup> The rich Native American history connected to the Bronnenberg property on the banks of the White River made it all the more appropriate and appealing to the membership at the time.

Dr. and Mary Westerfield were greatly instrumental in the ongoing negotiations for the grounds, and on August 12, 1892, the 34 acres of land was purchased from Carroll and Emily Bronnenberg for \$3,325.00. The Westerfields and Carroll Bronnenberg each gave large donations to the association enabling this purchase. (Harrison, *et al*, 18)

The *Indiana Association of Spiritualists* (IAOS) rapidly grew and expanded after finding its permanent home on the grounds of "Camp Chesterfield." Soon, however, problems arose as more and more people began to gravitate to the grounds in search of mediums to receive readings and attend séances, and to seek their own spiritual truth with likeminded people.

Horses had to be stabled, food served, and lodging facilities had to be made to accommodate all the people who were beginning to flock to Indiana's first and only Spiritualist camp. In the early years of Camp Chesterfield, members and visitors were required to bring their own tents, hay for their horses, and firewood for cooking. The mediums would sit out in the grassy grove on chairs to meet with people wishing to have a reading.

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<sup>19</sup> Spiritualists generally have five primary spirit guides who assist them: 1) a Doctor-Teacher who maintains a presence on the person's right side; 2) a Master-Teacher who is behind the person; 3) a Chemist (often Asian or Middle-Eastern) who is on the person's left side; 4) a Native American or Indian Protector who stands directly in front of the person; and 5) a Joy Guide (usually a child) who moves around the person but generally stays around the person's legs. (Leonard 1, 321)



[Illustration 9: A group picture of members and mediums from Camp Chesterfield, circa 1900. Photo courtesy of the *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.]

By the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Camp Meeting (the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention) in 1900, the campground was free from debt and many improvements had been added. Fences, wells and natural gas lines had been introduced. More cottages, plus the original two Séance Rooms, the Dining Hall, the Lodging House, the Auditorium, the Bazaar, and the Store with a long watering trough in front of it, were actively in use. (Harrison, *et al*, 18)

As more and more people came through the gates of Camp Chesterfield, it became apparent that a more substantial infrastructure was needed to accommodate the throngs of people who were making their way to this “spiritual center of light.” It was not long until the tents began to take the form of small two-room shanties with outhouses where the mediums could live and work. One room was for general living; the other used for readings and séances.<sup>20</sup>

## 7) The Growing Years

Singularly, the most important person to walk through the gates of Camp Chesterfield in the early 1900s was an unassuming schoolteacher from nearby Anderson, Indiana. The impact this woman would have on Camp Chesterfield and the *Indiana Association of Spiritualists*, as well as the religion of Spiritualism as a whole, is nothing short of prodigious. From around 1909 until her death in 1961, Reverend Mable Riffle<sup>21</sup> steered Camp

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<sup>20</sup> See Illustration 10.

<sup>21</sup> See Illustration 11.

Chesterfield with a strong hand as Secretary of the association. Rev. Riffle's resounding mantra during her long years of service to the *IAOS* and Spiritualism was a simple question: Is it good for Camp? (Richey, 2009) This was her response to any proposal, idea or change that the Board of Trustees, mediums, residents or members would endeavor to implement. If the answer were "no" then it would go no further. Her lifelong dedication to the "good" of Camp Chesterfield is evident in the huge growth that occurred under her watchful guidance.

Thanks to the work and dedication of this longtime secretary of the association, Camp Chesterfield expanded its physical composition tremendously during her tenure, replacing dilapidated wooden buildings with modern structures that would endure into the current era. Under her tutelage, Camp Chesterfield constructed a stone cathedral, a quaint chapel in the woods, a modern cafeteria, hotels, and a museum with an extensive collection of Spiritualist artifacts including the cornerstone of the original Fox Cottage and locks of hair from the Fox Sisters.



[Illustration 10: A View of the mediums' shanties on Broadway Street (now Parkview), Camp Chesterfield [date unknown]. Photo courtesy of Camp Chesterfield's *Hett Art Gallery Archives*.]

Rev. Riffle, however, was not free from ridicule, disparagement and even the occasional piece of bad press. Perhaps being the "face" of Camp Chesterfield for so many years—coupled with her stalwart manner of running the administrative arm of the

association—made her an easy target. A number of newspaper accounts<sup>22</sup> throughout her many successive terms as secretary detail numerous charges of humbuggery, fraud and conspiracy regarding her mediumship. Banned from giving readings in parts of Indiana and Ohio, Rev. Riffle defiantly appealed court convictions and paid fines throughout her tumultuous reign as the all-powerful secretary.

**Fake Medium Won't Appeal—Mrs. Mabel [sic] Riffle  
Pays \$25 Fine for Humbuggery**

Mrs. Mabel Riffle, fake medium, who was convicted, fined and sentenced in Police Court for practicing her humbuggery in Cleveland, Friday decided to pay her fine and court costs and get out of the state [of Ohio].

Henry A. Gillis, attorney for the medium, told Judge Charles Selzer that she had decided not to demand a new trial.

When the clairvoyant was convicted it was given out that rather than submit to the 30-day workhouse sentence and the \$25 fine, the case would be “appealed to the highest court in the land.”

Immediately after Mrs. Riffle received her sentence, her attorneys appealed for a new trial, claiming that “discrepancies” appeared in the testimony of the prosecution witnesses.

Hearing on the new trial motion was set for last Monday, but Mrs. Riffle did not appear.

Her attorney said she would be produced in court Friday. Gillis appeared Friday and paid the fine and court costs.

Mrs. Riffle, secretary of the Indiana State Spiritualists Association [sic], is active head of a camp at Andersonville [sic], and refused to come to Cleveland and make a personal appearance before Judge Selzer.

Payment of the fine and costs precludes an appeal.

Judge Selzer suspended her workhouse sentence on condition that she quit practicing her fakery in the county. (Archived newspaper account, publisher and date unknown)

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<sup>22</sup> The Hett Art Gallery and Museum at Camp Chesterfield has a plethora of archived documents from a wide variety of sources—some handwritten accounts, others published newspaper stories, as well as hotel registers, official correspondence and documents from the *Indiana Association of Spiritualists* day-to-day operations. Unfortunately, much of the information is not in any order (chronological or otherwise); the majority of newspaper accounts have no date or reference as to which newspaper originally published the article; due to humidity where the historical documents are stored, many documents are disintegrating. Even with these caveats in mind, the archives can still be regarded as a treasure trove of historical record, offering the researcher and scholar of Spiritualism ample clues as to how the camp functioned and who were the principle participants in Camp Chesterfield's long and colorful history.



Illustration 11: Reverend Mable Riffle, the longtime secretary of the Indiana Association of Spiritualists, circa 1930. Photo courtesy of the Hett Art Gallery and Museum, Camp Chesterfield.]

Love her or hate her, Mable Riffle was a powerful force who—despite continued attacks from her detractors—did much for the betterment of Camp Chesterfield and the *Indiana Association of Spiritualists*. For every critical article that appeared in newspapers condemning Spiritualism, mediumship, or Camp Chesterfield, she made it a point to have numerous positive articles appear detailing the commendable work being done at Camp Chesterfield on behalf of the religion and its members. Rev. Riffle was (in modern terms) a master at “spin,” always counteracting any negative press with a favorable account of the many functions being held at Camp Chesterfield.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> While gathering materials for this paper in the archives at Camp Chesterfield, I was amazed at the sheer number of newspaper articles detailing every possible activity that was taking place on the grounds during the time she was secretary. Whether it was Rev. Riffle’s mother’s birthday (who lived to be 100-years-old—upon her death, a number of newspapers ran her obituary); a workshop or class being offered in its seminary; a visiting lecturer speaking on spiritually-based topics; a guest-medium giving messages; or the dedication of one of the many new structures she had a hand in constructing—all were covered in the newspapers around the central Indiana area. This





[Illustration 12: 1935 group photo of Camp Chesterfield mediums; Rev. Mable Riffle is seated in the front row, third from the right. Photo courtesy of the *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.]

Upon Mable Riffle's death in 1961, the association and Camp Chesterfield continued to thrive largely due to her hard work and dedication over the prior half century of service to the IAOS, Camp Chesterfield and Spiritualism. Interestingly, Mable Riffle never became president, preferring to work as secretary, an office that allowed her to not only run the day-to-day functions of the camp, but also to be privy to all that was occurring within its gates.

According to an official program published by the IAOS in 1934, the first known year that John Fetzer walked through the gates of historic Camp Chesterfield, marked the 44<sup>th</sup> annual "Spiritualist Camp Meeting." The season at that time lasted from July 14 to August 26<sup>th</sup>, shorter than it is today. The program had daily activities and events, starting at 9:00

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constant barrage of good press surely counterpoised any negative publicity that occasionally plagued her and the other mediums working closely with her. Fraud and trickery within mediumship are well documented throughout Spiritualism's tumultuous history—and Camp Chesterfield is no exception, having weathered many storms that threatened to force it to close its gates. Today, strict guidelines are enforced at Camp Chesterfield to preclude any fakery by its staff mediums, with swift punishment being applied to any who might attempt such trickery with expulsion from the association and mediumship papers promptly rescinded. Not surprisingly, the IAOS serves as testimony of its allure and appeal for generations of Hoosiers. [See illustration 12.]



am and lasting until the evening. These included a lyceum, classes, and lectures in the form of sermons, afternoon message services and on the weekends a Saturday and Sunday evening séance in the auditorium. In addition, occasionally open forums would be offered as well as a special message hour that took place in the Ladies Bazaar.

One person usually conducted the classes scheduled in the mornings (and was scheduled for the entire week). This often was a resident medium/minister or a visiting medium and/or invited guest medium. In addition, "Grove Meetings"—a Spiritualist custom that harkens back to the very early years of Camp Chesterfield—was one of the more outstanding features of the scheduled program and these were conducted daily except for Saturdays and Mondays. These would last from 6:30 pm until 7:45 pm and would feature Camp Chesterfield's best speakers and message bearers. The Bazaar Message Hour took place on Mondays at the same time as the Grove Meetings, 6:30 until 7:45. In addition, special features of the program were offered such as noted speakers and mediums that would come for the weekends to demonstrate their particular gifts. In 1934, noted slate-writing medium, Mrs. Laura Pruden from Cincinnati, was a special-guest medium that would do private readings with visitors during the entire season.

The following is an excerpt from the 1934 program describing Camp Chesterfield:

Half a century ago, embosomed in a magnificent forest came the whispered voice from spirit saying, "Make this a center, for it is a holy spot." This happy thought was carried to the minds of its founders, and out of this hallowed place a great mecca for spiritualists has grown, and now instead of a dense woods the visitor is greeted with a broad expanse of scenic beauty of trees, shrubbery and flowers, Mother Nature in her mood of majestic playfulness assisted by the visitors from heaven, has made it a city, where the thousands come from all over the world to commune with their departed friends.

Camp Chesterfield is a historic place. The grounds are one mile northeast of the great Indiana State Park, the "prehistoric mounds", built by the mound builders.

And this camp was the meeting place for the first spiritualists' organization in the state of Indiana; and every well-known pioneer in the ranks of spiritualism has visited and worked on the camp.

The campgrounds have been beautifully laid out in streets. Two large hotels, library, stores, dining room and many homes, and the center of the park is a large open space where the thousands gathers with their picnic parties and the evening open air meetings are held in this park and hundreds come in for these great meetings. Only the best of talent, both speaker and medium, is permitted to work in these meetings.

The greatest mediums in the field today are programmed throughout the entire season. We have all phases represented. Clairvoyant direct voice materialization, trance, slate writing, spirit photography. (*44<sup>th</sup> Annual Spiritualist Camp Meeting Program*, IAOS, 1934)

Just like any organization trying to attract members and visitors to attend, Camp Chesterfield in 1934 offered a number of additional amenities to make people's stays at Camp Chesterfield more interesting and entertaining. Musical programs were regularly scheduled featuring the "Exie Hardy Orchestra" that featured well-known Spiritualist names at the time, Ruby Smith, Minnie Davis, and Jean Auteureith who were "soloists" that sang with the invited band. Ice cream was a welcome diversion to get relief from the hot and humid Indiana summer; a fully functional ice cream parlor was well attended by the many visitors coming through the gates of Camp Chesterfield during this era.

In 1934, it cost John Fetzer 10 cents for a single admission into the campgrounds. Or he could buy a weekly ticket for 70 cents—which was not a discount and serves as testament to how popular Camp Chesterfield was because buying a single ticket for a day was no higher than buying the weekly ticket. However, should he have decided to stay longer than a week and remain during the whole camp meeting season, he could purchase a season pass for \$3.00...which was cheaper than the daily admission fee. Two hotels were available for accommodation—the Lily and the Sunflower. A single room, per night, was \$1.00. This included use of a communal bathroom and shower and heat (even though Indiana summers would not necessitate using heat, the hotels boasted the fact that central heating was available—no air-conditioning, however, which would have been much more preferred). Meals were served in the full-service dining hall, lovingly prepared and served by Arthur Riffle, husband and spouse to the powerful Camp Secretary, Mable Riffle. The program for 1934 boasted the dining hall as having "the best of food" and "home cooking." A visitor to Camp Chesterfield, then, had all of his or her needs accommodated and could stay on grounds for the entire time they were at Camp Chesterfield as all of their necessary needs were provided by the IAOS and its facilities.

A typical program during 1934 included a selection of "trumpet mediums", "clairvoyant mediums", "divine healers", "trance mediums", "crystal readers", "materializing mediums", "spirit photography", and "slate writing."<sup>24</sup> Many well-known names within Spiritualism and

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<sup>24</sup> A trumpet medium is one who is able to receive messages via a tin trumpet. During the séance, the trumpet allegedly rises from the table and using energy to form ectoplasm from the medium and sitters, a voice box forms within the trumpet and spirit then offers vocal messages. Clairvoyant mediums receive messages by seeing spirit through their mind's eye and this can be very

mediumship were scheduled during the 1934 season and it is quite likely that John Fetzer attended séances, received private readings, and attended some of the many public services that were offered during that time. The two primary mediums whom John Fetzer had a personal affinity for, however, were not yet associated with Camp Chesterfield. Charlie Swann and Lillian Dee Johnson with whom John Fetzer had many one-on-one sessions in later years were not yet listed as mediums on staff at Camp Chesterfield.

## **8) The Later Years: The 1960s and 1970s at Camp Chesterfield**

After major wars, Spiritualism historically tended to rise in stature and scope, prompting bereaved relatives to search for some sort of sign or message from those whom they lost so tragically. These anguished times were actually stimulating days for the IAOS and Camp Chesterfield, as well, with crowds of people clamoring to get through its gates. The ongoing need for improving and constructing new public facilities to accommodate the throngs of people was an area in which Rev. Mable Riffle had much vision and forethought.<sup>25</sup> She also was very adept at fundraising, which allowed Camp Chesterfield to prosper. After her death, this momentum continued for some time, allowing Camp Chesterfield to continue growing through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

Interest in Spiritualism typically ebbed and flowed throughout its history. After any major war, as previously mentioned, Spiritualism always had a surge of interest. This was true during the Vietnam War, as well. People from all around would seek out the mediumship of a Camp Chesterfield medium in order to bring closure and to make contact with a loved one.

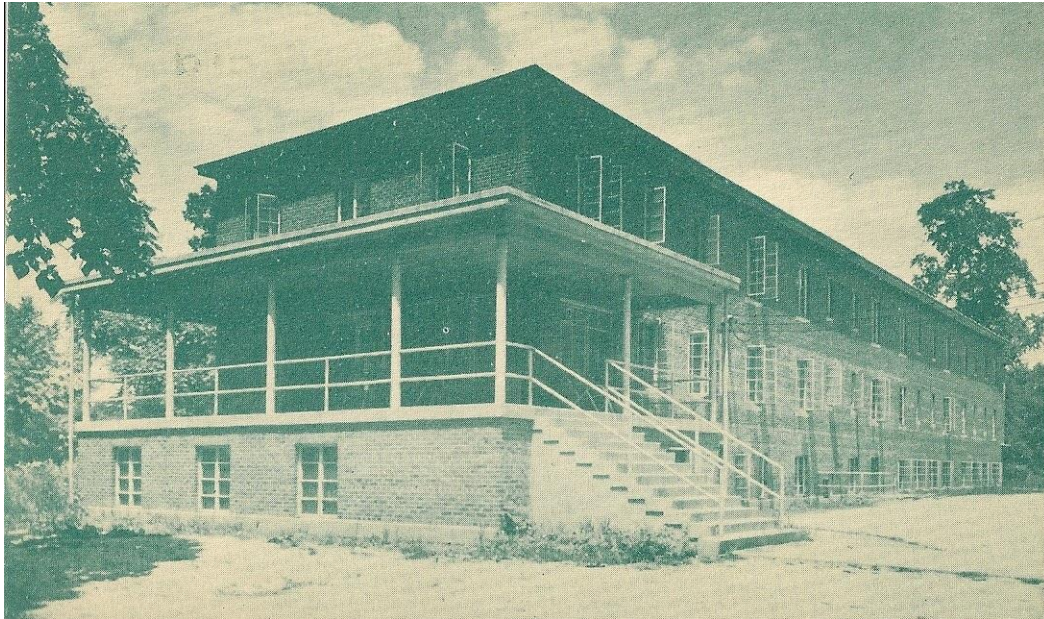
The 1960s and 70s were spirituous and exhilarating times for Camp Chesterfield with many visitors coming through her gates during the high season. Social instability around

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descriptive with symbology and actual forms of those in the spirit world. Divine healers offer a "laying of hands" to relieve or cure ailments and pains by those receiving the healing. Trance mediums are able to set aside their own ego for a time to allow spirit to come through and speak to a sitter directly; often the medium is unaware of the message being given as the body is taken over temporarily by the medium's guide in Spirit. Crystal readers use natural crystals and the energy that is emitted from these stones to offer sitters healings and messages. A materializing medium uses "physical" phenomena as opposed to strictly "mental" mediumship to allow spirits of loved ones to materialize physically using energy in the form of ectoplasm from the medium. Spirit photography focused on portraiture that included loved ones and guides in the resulting photograph. Slate writing featured a small slate with chalk where spirit would physically write messages to sitters during a séance.

<sup>25</sup> As mentioned earlier, Rev. Mable Riffle was the impetus and catalyst in modernizing Camp Chesterfield's infrastructure. She oversaw the construction of the Cathedral, Chapel, Western Hotel, Maxon Cafeteria, and the Hett Art Gallery while on the Board of Trustees as Secretary.

the country, as well as a need to experience something new, played key roles in how Spiritualism was received in society. People were eager to experience New Age teachings and to get into touch with their own psychic-selves and to develop their own mediumship.



[Illustration 13: A postcard of the newly constructed “Western Hotel” where it is known that John Fetzer stayed during his frequent visits to Camp Chesterfield; circa 1950. Photo courtesy of the Hett Art Gallery and Museum, Camp Chesterfield.]

A typical stay at Camp Chesterfield during a summer weekend in 1974, the last known year that John Fetzer visited the grounds, would have included a variety of planned events and activities. The Western Hotel<sup>26</sup> was the newer and more modern of the three hotels on grounds and a one night’s stay cost \$8.00 for a private room with a bathroom. It was a full-service experience with meals being prepared on site at the Maxon Cafeteria, which was dedicated in 1955, offering breakfast, lunch and dinner to visitors and also a place to sit in air-conditioned comfort to chat with others who had come there to get readings, attend séances, take classes, attend services and to enjoy the peaceful and serene grounds.

A normal day during high season would include a morning chapel class at 10:30 AM, followed by a healing service in the chapel in the early afternoon at 1:00. At 2:15 a daily cathedral service took place that included a sermon with a message service that always

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<sup>26</sup> See illustration 13.

had clairvoyance<sup>27</sup> and one other mediumship offering, usually blindfolded billets.<sup>28</sup> At 6:30 pm each day, either a chapel vesper service or grove vesper service was offered during the weekdays where a lecture was given, with messages offered in the form of “spirit greetings.” On the weekends, due to the sheer number of people attending, the evening service was done in the cathedral, which could hold nearly 1,000 people for a service.

In 1974, two guest speakers of international stature were scheduled to teach and lecture during the summer:

## 1974 Guest Speakers

### DR. MARCUS BACH

Dr. Marcus Bach, world traveler, author of 20 books, is a foremost researcher into the real meaning of life. Dr. Bach holds a PhD from the University of Iowa and four honorary degrees.

His most recent book, “What’s Right with the World?” puts forth proof of how the human spirit can triumph privately, even in the midst of chaos.

Dr. Bach is the founder of the Fellowship for Spiritual Understanding, with a basic aim of testing practical, creative approaches to the individual’s role in modern life and his Spiritual integration.

Dr. Bach will serve Camp Chesterfield August 3 through August 8, programmed for appearances at our Cathedral Services, and conducting an especial Workshop, THE COMING OF THE NEW MAN, consisting of The Physical Psychic Man, The Intellectual Man, The Spiritual man. The tuition for this Workshop is \$15.00 per person; or \$3.50 per person per class.

### DR. GEORGE M. LAMSA

Dr. George M. Lamsa, a native of Kurdistan in the basin of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, began translating ancient Aramaic manuscripts into English in the 1920s and completed the last in 1957, to present **The Holy Bible from the Preshitta.**

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<sup>27</sup> Clairvoyance is a French word, meaning, “clear seeing.” This is the most common kind of mediumship as the medium sees images and symbols in his/her mind’s eye and relates the message to the sitter.

<sup>28</sup> Blindfolded billets involve small sheets of paper where the sitters write names and questions. The medium then tapes his/her eyes several times and places a heavy blindfold over the eye area. The medium then unfolds the paper and by being in darkness from the blindfold can then sense through psychometry the names of the loved ones in spirit and/or the questions written to offer a message from either his/her guides or the person’s loved ones in Spirit.

Dr. Lamsa states that many errors have crept into the Bible because other translations are from the Greek taking literal meanings of many Aramaic words and not the meaning intended in the manuscripts. When we learn what the Bible says, it is logical and it works!

Dr. Lamsa will visit Camp Chesterfield from July 20 through July 28, programmed for appearances at our Cathedral Services and conducting the Chapel Class, Monday through Saturday. (1974 Camp Chesterfield 88<sup>th</sup> Annual Convocation Booklet, pp. 6-7)<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the invited speakers, Camp Chesterfield always hosted a number of other well-known Spiritualist mediums and ministers throughout the summer season. The regular Camp Chesterfield staff mediums numbered in the dozens (over 30), working throughout the summer on platform during church and message services, offering classes to students, giving readings and conducting séances, as well as assisting with any and all manner of duties that would be needed to be done throughout the season from volunteering in the cafeteria or hotel, to filling in for those who would have to cancel or could not work a service due to illness.

The two mediums that John Fetzer worked most closely with when visiting Camp Chesterfield were Charles Swann and Lillian Dee Johnson.<sup>30</sup> In the 1974 “88<sup>th</sup> Annual Convocation” book, Charles Swann’s gifts were listed as Clairvoyant, Direct Voice,<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> It is important to note that both of these men were international figures and the fact that they came to rural Indiana to give lectures at Camp Chesterfield is testimony in itself as to the high stature Camp Chesterfield enjoyed as a place of spiritual enlightenment during this time period. Dr. Bach’s papers and teachings are now housed at Brigham Young University. He passed away in 1995. [See: <https://lib.byu.edu/collections/marcus-bach-collection/about/biography/>] Dr. George Lamsa’s translations of the Bible are still considered the gold standard today by religious scholars around the world. His renowned work with the Bible also speaks to the fact that during this time period, Camp Chesterfield was a very Christian-based Spiritualist community. Many of the well-known mediums were avowed “Christian-Spiritualists” so it is no wonder that someone of Dr. Lamsa’s status, coupled with his expertise on the Bible, would be invited and hosted by Camp Chesterfield. He passed away in 1975. [See: <http://www.equip.org/article/george-m-lamsa/>]

<sup>30</sup> See Appendix A for a Photo Gallery of pictures of Charles Swann and Lillian Dee Johnson.

<sup>31</sup> Direct voice is when voices speak out during a séance, which are independent from the medium. The medium acts as facilitator of the phenomena in that the spirit uses the energy of the medium through “ectoplasm” in order to form a voice box to give a vocal message. Often times a trumpet is used (hence the term “trumpet medium”) where the spirit speaks to sitters directly through the trumpet. The medium sometimes speaks independently as it is not his/her voice that is being used and hence can participate in the discourse with the spirit.

Trance,<sup>32</sup> Skotograph,<sup>33</sup> and Precipitation<sup>34</sup> Medium. Lillian Dee Johnson's gifts were Speaker, Teacher, Clairvoyant, Direct Voice, Trance, and Card Writing Medium.

## **9) Rev. Lillian Dee Johnson**

The archives at Camp Chesterfield had quite a bit of material related to Charlie Swann and his work, and much less related to Lillian Dee Johnson.<sup>35</sup> However, in a handout from the 1974 Chesterfield Seminary (August 19-23), Lillian Dee Johnson was listed as a faculty member and she was scheduled to teach "Beginning Bible Study" and "Metaphysics for Everyday Living." Although quite different in context, this type of pairing is quite natural and common within Spiritualism. Someone who is capable of teaching the intricacies of the Holy Bible, and who likely considered herself to be a "Christian-Spiritualist," was quite comfortable in stepping between two very distinct areas of spirituality. Lillian Dee Johnson was a huge figure in Spiritualism and Camp Chesterfield, serving faithfully for her entire life to the ideals and tenets of Spiritualism, promoting and volunteering at camp functions regularly. Well-known and well loved, she had a huge following due to her unique gifts and ability to contact spirit to offer messages to those who came to her for readings.

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<sup>32</sup> Trance is one form of mental mediumship where mediums either go into a full trance (where they are unaware of happenings around them and what is coming through them) or a semi-trance state (where the mediums are somewhat aware but whose minds are being used by the entity to give a message). In trance, mediums offer messages to sitters that come directly from spirit guides or loved ones that come through the medium's actual voice.

<sup>33</sup> Skotography, also sometimes called "thoughtography," is when a medium is psychically able to transfer an image onto photographic paper or film by holding the paper or film to his/her head to create a picture or image, which are alleged to be impressions from the spirit world. [For a detailed explanation of this process by an eyewitness, see Appendix B.]

<sup>34</sup> Precipitation is a form of physical mediumship that enlists the help of etheric beings to "precipitate" or materialize a message or image on a card, silk cloth, or painting. Apports, or "gifts from spirit," are also precipitated in that they appear seemingly out of thin air. The actual material is from the physical, but is somehow dematerialized in the etheric and rematerialized via the gifts of the medium and his/her guides. For a detailed explanation of "pictures on silk", see Appendix C for an eyewitness account of this physical phenomenon.

<sup>35</sup> Please see Appendix A for a "Photo Gallery" of related photographs featuring Charles Swann and Lillian Dee Johnson.





[Illustration 14: Chesterfield Seminary, 1974. Photo courtesy of the *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.]

As a staff medium and faculty member of the education and seminary arm of the association, Lillian Dee Johnson was partly instrumental (along with other well-regarded teachers) in making the Camp Chesterfield seminary quite renowned, attracting students from all over the United States, and beyond, in the study of Spiritualism, New Age Spirituality, and Metaphysics. Being one of a few Spiritualist organizations that offered formal certification in mediumship, healing, and the ministry set Camp Chesterfield apart from other similar associations that primarily relied upon affiliated churches to train and develop mediums and offer classes toward ordination. Camp Chesterfield gained a reputation for educating, training and developing Spiritualist mediums that were sought after for their intuitive abilities by not only Spiritualists, but also by non-Spiritualists alike. Camp Chesterfield's mediums were endearingly referred to as "name callers" because when a spirit would come through, it was most often by name, which offered confirmation to the person receiving the message.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> This made a huge difference in how Camp Chesterfield was perceived by the general public. Anyone of a certain age could safely be given a message by a medium from a "grandmother" in Spirit, but it was much more authentic and legitimate to receive a message with an actual name (and better to have several associated names the receiver readily recognizes). This ability of Chesterfield mediums to be so specific and confirming, allowed Camp Chesterfield to enjoy a wide and diverse following of adherents.



I had an opportunity to interview by telephone the granddaughter of Lillian Dee Johnson, Susan Phipps, on April 16, 2016. She fondly remembers her grandmother, but was only twelve years old when Rev. Johnson made her physical transition into Spirit. Ms. Phipps' mother, Rev. Phyllis Dee Harrison, continued on doing her mother's work and lived in Rev. Johnson's home at Camp Chesterfield and in Bradenton, Florida until her own death on October 22, 2007.

Lillian Dee Johnson was born on October 12, 1898 and passed into Spirit at the age of seventy-six on February 10, 1975. During the years that Lillian Dee Johnson served and lived at Camp Chesterfield, she maintained her primary residence in Bradenton, Florida where she was active in the nearby St. Petersburg church of "People's Spiritualist Church" which was a snowbirds' church for mediums of Camp Chesterfield who wintered in Florida.

According to Lillian Dee Johnson's granddaughter, Susan Phipps, it is her recollection from her own experience and her mother's stories that it was in the late 1940s that Lillian Dee Johnson had first started to live and work regularly at Camp Chesterfield. This follows closely the known timeline we have for Rev. Johnson because we know she was ordained in 1946 and most likely had started to serve Camp Chesterfield as a certified medium shortly prior to this and began working regularly after being ordained.<sup>37</sup>

As was the custom in those days, mediums did not normally live year round in their cottages on grounds but only were in residence during the high season (between June and September). This was the case for Ms. Phipps' mother and grandmother. She and her sisters would often travel with her mother and grandmother to Indiana after school finished in June and would summer at Camp Chesterfield until September, right before their school year in Florida would begin. She remembered her grandmother using the designated reading room of the cottage and her mother using the enclosed and glassed front porch to do readings when they were both at Camp Chesterfield at the same time. After her grandmother passed into Spirit, her mother then used the interior reading room

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<sup>37</sup> Camp Chesterfield is notorious for vetting thoroughly any medium that wishes to serve at camp. In the time period that Rev. Johnson would have been wanting to be given a lease to purchase a cottage on grounds, there was most certainly a waiting list of other mediums who were waiting for a cottage to become available and approval process could take anywhere from one to several years to receive permission. This is still true today. In order to qualify for a lease at Camp Chesterfield, the person must be a member in good standing of the Indiana Association of Spiritualists (IAOS) for at least one year, be certified as either a medium, healer, associate minister or an ordained Spiritualist minister, and be able to serve camp regularly in some capacity by demonstrating his/her spiritual gifts on platform, in church services, and to also potentially teach classes for the seminaries. In addition, mediums do not own the land where their cottages are located but they have 99-year leases for the property. Each medium owns his/her own home, but not the land.

to give readings to clients. As a child, Ms. Phipps remembers her grandmother and mother giving readings continuously when they were in Indiana, as well as working diligently with camp affairs such as church services and teaching classes. Since Bradenton, Florida is near to where John Fetzer's Detroit Tigers did their winter training, it is quite likely that he was able to consult with Rev. Lillian Dee Johnson while they both were in Florida during the winter months.



CHESTERFIELD SEMINARY 1972  
CHESTERFIELD INDIANA

Illustration 15: A group photo of students and teachers involved in the 1972 Summer Seminary at Camp Chesterfield. Photo courtesy of Camp Chesterfield's *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*.

In handwritten notes found in the archives at the *Hett Art Gallery and Museum* at Camp Chesterfield, huge changes occurred in 1949 when an actual seminary was founded in order to train and certify mediums, and ordain ministers. The Spiritualist Episcopal Church sponsored the first seminary and the pastor, Rev. John Bunker, was the first official Dean and Earlene Chaney was the Registrar.

When John Bunker died in 1956, Rev. Mable Riffle decided that Rev. Clifford Bias should start a new organization to pick up where Rev. Bunker left off. The *Universal Spiritualist Association* (USA) was founded and took over the education arm of training and certifying mediums and ministers. It was at this time that both Lillian Dee Johnson and Charlie Swann's wife, Pauline, took leadership roles in the educational division of the association and Charlie Swann worked alongside Rev. Bias in developing teaching materials for the newly founded seminaries. Rev. Mable Riffle initially did not want the

IAOS to have a school, but was happy to farm these obligations out to the *Universal Spiritualist Association*. Later, when a rift occurred between the *Universal Spiritualist Association* and the *Indiana Association of Spiritualists* when Rev. Bias was brought up on a morals charge while serving the church in Florida, the membership effectively split with half supporting the USA and the other supporting the IAOS.

Before the split occurred, however, Rev. Mable Riffle was quite helpful in assisting the new *Universal Spiritualist Association* with a charter and constitution and by-laws. The first meeting was held in Lillian Dee Johnson's home at the time and Rev. Clifford Bias was appointed the first Dean and Pauline Swann as the Registrar. A Board also had to be created for the new association, hence Rev. Clifford Bias was elected President; Rev. Lillian Dee Johnson as Vice-President; Pauline Swann as Secretary-Treasurer; and Rev. Lytle Sensbaugh, Rev. Penny Umbach, and Rev. Austin Wallace as Trustees. Hence, the first Chesterfield Seminary was held in August of 1956 and it was sponsored by the *Universal Spiritualist Association* and continued in this way until 1971. Today, it is called: *Chesterfield Spiritualist Seminary and School of Metaphysics*. Clearly, the Swanns and Lillian Dee Johnson played integral roles at Camp Chesterfield and served the association in a variety of capacities.

#### **10) Rev. Charlie Swann**

Charles Swann, who went by "Charlie" to his friends and close associates, first came to Camp Chesterfield as a young man in the 1940s—at a time in his life when he was first starting out to make a name for himself in mediumship. He was one of four very outstanding mediums who were collectively called the "Fearsome Foursome"<sup>38</sup> because of their abilities and gifts.

I had an opportunity to visit Rev. Swann's wife, Pauline Swann, in 2015 but due to her advanced age (mid-90s) and her hesitancy to discuss the "old days," I was not able to ascertain any concrete information or details from her regarding her husband's mediumship and their married life at Camp Chesterfield. In the archives at the Hett Art Gallery and Museum, I did find many references to their work at Camp Chesterfield since they arrived there in the 1940s and stayed until Rev. Charlie Swann passed, and Pauline Swann remained on the grounds until she had to be relocated a number of years ago to a nursing facility in Chesterfield where she continues to live as of the writing of this paper.

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<sup>38</sup> See illustration 16.

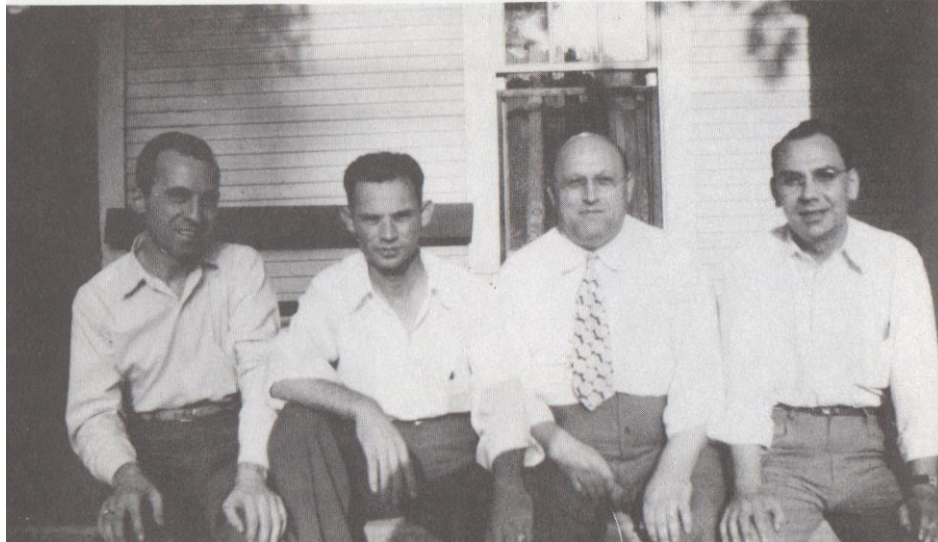
Fortunately, however, because Rev. Swann was so well-known and had a huge following from around the world regarding his unique gifts of physical phenomena, much had been written about him in a number of periodicals, most often and notably in the *Psychic Observer*. Two of these articles are included in their entirety in Appendices B & C. People would travel from near and far to partake in his precipitated silk séances and to sit for psychic readings from him. John Fetzer certainly appreciated his gifts and regularly visited Camp Chesterfield to receive readings and to sit in séance with Rev. Swann.

Charles Swann was born on March 7, 1920 and made his transition into Spirit on September 18, 1993. The Swann family came to Camp Chesterfield from Michigan in the late 1940s where they were active in the Spiritualist Episcopal Church, founded by Rev. John Bunker in Eaton Rapids. John Bunker was a noted and sought after Camp Chesterfield medium and he served as a mentor to Charlie Swann. Both Charlie and Pauline Swann were active their entire lives in the *Indiana Association of Spiritualists* and in the *Universal Spiritualist Association*. After the falling out, even though they remained as residents on the grounds of Camp Chesterfield, they devoted their time and effort mainly to the USA because at that time it had started its own Spiritualist Camp (Maple Grove in Anderson, Indiana) and continued teaching classes and certifying and ordaining ministers in its own seminary. Chesterfield Seminary also continued to offer seminary classes and certified mediums and ordained ministers, as well.

Rev. Swann also worked at Camp Chesterfield's sister church in St. Petersburg, Florida (People's Spiritualist Church) and hence was likely able to have had contact with John Fetzer when they were both in Florida at the same time during the winter season when Mr. Fetzer would oversee the winter training of the Detroit Tigers and Rev. Swann would do guest lectures and mediumship work in St. Petersburg. These were likely in addition to the times they would meet in the summer months on the grounds of Camp Chesterfield when John Fetzer would visit Indiana from Michigan.

Internationally, Charlie Swann had quite a reputation and following, as well. For example, I found an article in the *Hett Art Gallery and Museum* archives published in Spanish from the *Voz Informativa: Revista de Espiritismo* (Febrero de 1955) featuring an article about Rev. Swann's precipitated silk séances. A participant who attended one of Rev. Swann's séances wrote it as an eyewitness account. He was frequently asked to

lecture and travel and he was in high demand for many decades when he was conducting séances and offering readings to clients in his home at Camp Chesterfield.



[Illustration 16: The “Fearsome Foursome”: (left to right: Rev. James Laughton; Rev. Charles Swann; Rev. John Bunker; and Rev. Clifford Bias. [Photo courtesy of the *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield]



[Illustration 17: Medium’s postcard. These were used as a sort of “name card” or “business card” by practicing mediums. It featured their name and photo and could be used as a post card, which was a form of advertising by word of mouth. [Photo courtesy of the *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.]



[Illustration 18: Clifford Bias and Charles Swann circa 1940s. Photo courtesy of the *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.]

## 11) Camp Chesterfield Today

As with many denominations that experienced a crisis in membership, the 1990s<sup>39</sup> onward have witnessed a drop in overall church attendance and Camp Chesterfield has not been immune to this trend. A decrease in monetary donations and fewer students opting to matriculate into the educational programs, which offer certification as healers, mediums and associate ministers, as well as eventual ordination into the Spiritualist ministry, have seen a drop in attendance from the late 1980s.

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<sup>39</sup> The embracing of modern technology and media (i.e. the Internet) may possibly explain why some churches experienced a drop in membership, donations, and participation while others expanded exponentially becoming “mega churches.” Churches that are quick to embrace modern trends and initiate technology positively within their spiritual structure often are able to attract parishioners by adapting to the outside world. Spiritualism historically is not a missionary or evangelical-based religion, instead preferring adherents to come to the religion by their own volition (i.e. “Those who are meant to come will find it on their own”). Generally, Spiritualism has been very slow and hesitant to accept modern technology in spreading its message, preferring to take a spiritual attitude toward such endeavors. Spiritualism’s peer religions, Mormonism and Christian Science, have been much more successful in maintaining their religions by proselytizing and conforming more rapidly to societal changes.

Often, people initially seek out a Spiritualist medium due to a tragedy with which they need to find solace and closure. Once this occurs, many adherents move on to other spiritual endeavors—or return to their mainstream church from whence they initially came. The original problem the person encountered which prompted him/her to seek out a Spiritualist medium is resolved (on some level) and interest in the religion then sometimes wanes.

To Spiritualists, this is “divine order” and is as it is supposed to be in the larger spiritual picture. The practical, fiscal side of the religion, however, needs active adherents who do not view the religion or camp only as a spiritual Disneyland where one can get a reading, attend a séance, or take a class on how to see auras, but rather what is needed are dedicated members who will continue to support the church and its activities for the duration.<sup>40</sup> Also, Spiritualism, which was originally the “anti-church” church, is much too “churchified” for people who want a New Age experience without the obligation of belonging to a church (which requires a certain amount of dedication, attendance, and participation). Modern society—through television, books, workshops, and the Internet—offers people quick fixes to their spiritual needs, precluding the need for them to be parishioners in a specific church.

Today, Camp Chesterfield continues to exist due in large part to the original vision of its founding members and the commitment of its longtime secretary, Mable Riffle. The current dilemma facing the IAOS and Camp Chesterfield, and many other churches, too will pass. Historically, Spiritualism has regularly endured times of great prosperity and times of near extinction.

Camp Chesterfield, as it modernizes its appeal to a new generation of spiritual seekers, will continue to offer confirmation of life after death to those who come through its gates, just as John Fetzer first did in 1934 and continued to do so for four decades. There have been a number of physical changes on the grounds since John Fetzer first

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<sup>40</sup> This issue has plagued Spiritualism from its earliest beginnings. Many “Spiritualists” historically were nominal adherents, at best, attending a mainstream Christian church on Sunday mornings, and then attending a Spiritualist service later (and maybe a séance). Many Spiritualist camps, like Camp Chesterfield, have a “high season” (from June-September) in which mediums are in residence to attend to the many people who visit for readings and séances. This seasonal arrangement has further added to people’s general attitude and confusion about what the church is and how it functions in a camp setting. Instead of it being a regular church they attend and support, it becomes a vacation where they can just visit a week or two in the summer and many feel there is no further need to offer financial or volunteer support because it is not during “season.” In the case of Camp Chesterfield, it is a year-round camp that has regular church services and functions throughout the year and not just during “season.”

visited, but he would have no trouble recognizing everything as it is very nearly the way it was when he frequently visited. The same desire and purpose remains—to offer comfort and solace through spirit communication to those who want to confirmation that their loved ones are still around and are all right. Although the number of visitors and members may not be the same as in its heyday, as interest in the paranormal and communication with the so-called dead heightens, so will interest in this “Old Age” religion. For well-over one-hundred and thirty years, the IAOS (and later Camp Chesterfield) has been a “spiritual center of light” to many generations of Hoosiers and others, offering comfort and healing to all those who enter upon its grounds.

### **Epilogue**

The main attraction of Spiritualism for people seeking spirituality, that has now spanned multiple generations since its inception in 1848, comes down to one primary incentive—spirit communication. People seek out a medium in order to connect with a loved one who has transitioned from the Earth plane to the Spirit plane.

A typical Spiritualist service is not too much unlike that of any ordinary Protestant service of a Christian denomination, except that after the sermon, mediums will offer messages from loved ones on the other side of the veil to those in attendance. Over the years, Spiritualism has not really changed, but has grown into its own as a religion, philosophy, and science. One beautiful aspect of Spiritualism is that it allows anyone who is sincerely seeking a spiritual truth through love and light may believe and adhere to any religious tradition *and* Spiritualism at the same time.

Therefore, that is why Camp Chesterfield has been the spiritual home of many diverse and varied spiritual seekers who have been followers, and who continue to follow, all of the major religions and other esoteric spiritual paths. Because so many mediums are not “cradle to grave” Spiritualists, but often grow up in a different religious tradition before embracing Spiritualism (often coming from Catholic or Protestant traditions), it is no surprise then that many of those who came through the front gates brought with them their own religious traditions that were grounded in Christianity. Simply, it was what they knew and what they were most comfortable with and hence became “Christian-Spiritualists.”

Many of the old mediums that were instrumental in building Camp Chesterfield, like Rev. Mable Riffle, were avowed Christian-Spiritualists and were responsible for including many of the Christian-based iconography in the various buildings and displays on the



grounds; and in many of the rituals that make up the religious aspects of the belief system. In recent times, Camp Chesterfield has been the spiritual home of Spiritualists who also subscribe to a variety of religious traditions: An Episcopalian Priest, a Methodist Minister, a Catholic Nun, a Native American Shaman, a Jewish Mystic, a Buddhist, a Muslim, a Wiccan, and many other religious traditions, as well as many (if not all) of the Protestant denominations within the Christian religion.

Spiritualism is not contrary to any religious tradition, accepting the truths from all religions and spiritual movements. Just as Madame B.P. Blavatsky wrote in the *Theosophist* in August of 1882 when asked “Can a Spiritualist call himself a Theosophist without altering his faith? and *vice versa*?” she replied: “Yes, many excellent persons are both, and none need alter his faith.” Madame Blavatsky went on to say: “The difference is in our theories to account for the phenomena. We say they are *mainly*, though not *always*, due to the action of other influences than that of the disembodied conscious spirits of the dead. The Spiritualists affirm the contrary.”

There was a time when very few Spiritualists believed in reincarnation, but today, a majority of Spiritualists adhere to this concept and believe that as souls, we have many opportunities to experience the physical on Earth in order to grow spiritually by experiencing a multitude of life’s issues, dramas, problems, and joys. The Natural Law of “Cause and Effect” (*karma*) ensures that we humans are accountable for our actions—both good and bad—and retribution will occur at some point...if not in this incarnation, then in a future incarnation because the door to reformation is never closed and all souls are redeemable. As well, the concepts of heaven and hell for Spiritualists are not locations, but rather conditions that we create for ourselves in this world.

Unlike in the past, physical mediumship is not as common today as mental mediumship. There are, perhaps, a number of reasons why physical phenomena and manifestations do not occur today with the same frequency and regularity as they once did.

First, mediums in the past devoted their entire beings to developing their mediumship. They usually did not have “day jobs” where they were away from their home throughout the day to return to do their spiritual work—their whole lives consisted of developing their gifts by meditating and actually practicing mediumship on a daily basis.

Second, in the past, people solely ate organic, whole and raw foods and were never exposed to processed food, GMOs, or preservatives. Their physical constitution was

much purer than the average modern person is today because they did not have the chemicals, toxins, and additives in their bodies that we eat regularly today and that are so common in nearly all foods sold in supermarkets.

Third, mediums of yesteryear were not bombarded with microwaves and radiation that is a part of modern society. Radio waves, microwaves, and radiation are all around us and when one is sensitive to energy and one is trying to hone his or her mediumship skills, these outside forces interfere with the connection and one's ability to channel and connect with Spirit.

Finally, the fourth reason, modern society with all of its conveniences and timesaving gadgets has actually filled one's normal day with more taxing compulsions than our ancestors ever had to deal with, including television, radio, social media like Twitter and Facebook, the Internet, and many other types of technology that seem to fill our days completely. Mediums in the old days would meditate for hours on end and not be distracted with all the things that have become a normal part of our daily life today.

For these reasons, I believe that mediums today do not have physical manifestations like trumpet mediumship, direct voice, and silk precipitations and skotography like they once did because our bodies have changed energetically and the modern diet and outside technological influences have made it more difficult to build the necessary energy from within to allow ectoplasm to flow in order to manifest physical phenomena.

In conclusion, it is difficult to say with any certainty what John Fetzer was told in his private sessions with mediums like Rev. Charles Swann and Rev. Lillian Dee Johnson. Perhaps they were able to foretell the future for him psychically. It is important to note that all mediums are psychic to some degree, but not all psychics are mediums. The primary purpose of consulting a medium is to communicate with a loved one who has transitioned into Spirit. Occasionally, mediums do have psychic revelations and they are able to give this information to the person receiving the reading. Suffice to say, however, that this is not the primary purpose of seeking out the guidance of a Spiritualist medium. Receiving a message from a loved one or Spirit guide is the goal. And although any medium worth his or her salt would not make any definitive promises of being able to do so (because one never knows who or what may come through during a séance or message service), it is always gratifying and comforting when a message of love and hope does come through that is validated and confirmed by the receiver. It proves the continuity

of life that indeed a loved one did touch in and communicated with the medium, and that is what Spiritualism is all about.

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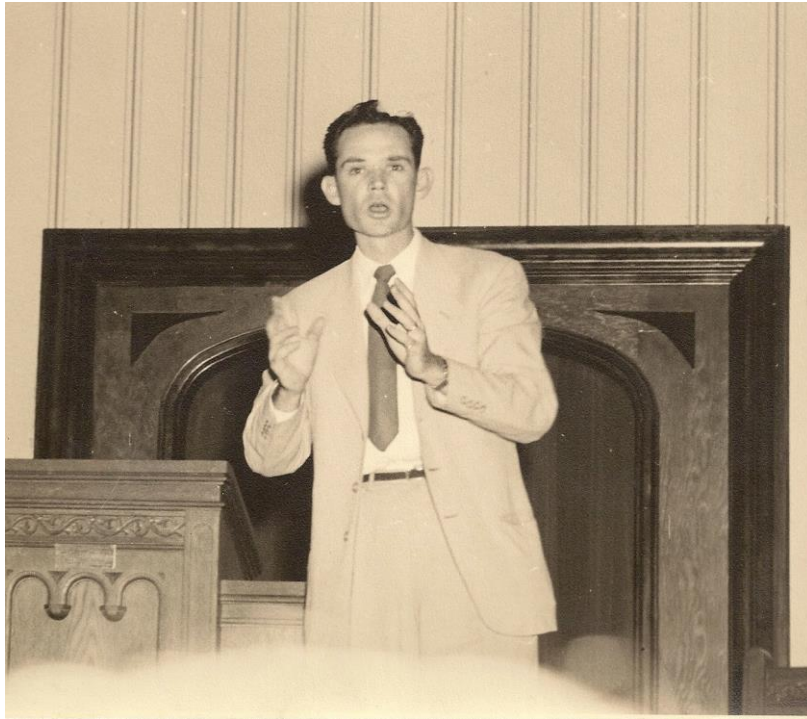
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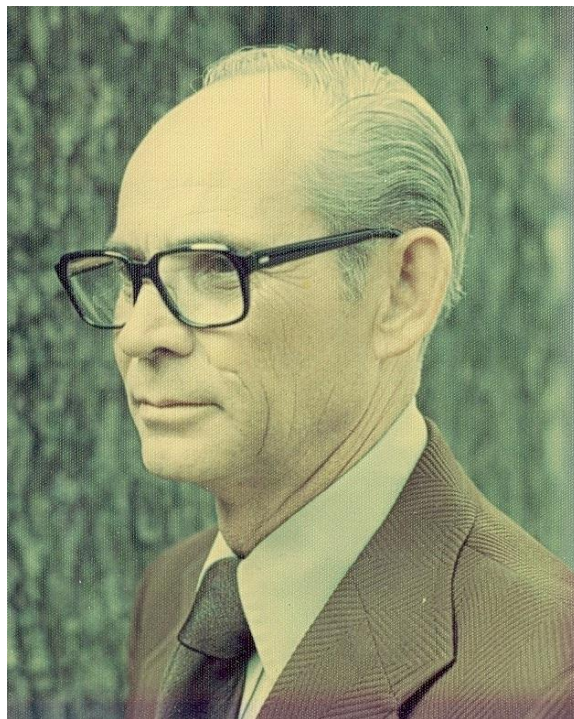
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## Appendix A: Photo Gallery



Charles Swann on platform at Camp Chesterfield. Photo courtesy of *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.



Rev. Charles Swann, circa 1970s, Camp Chesterfield. Photo courtesy of *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.

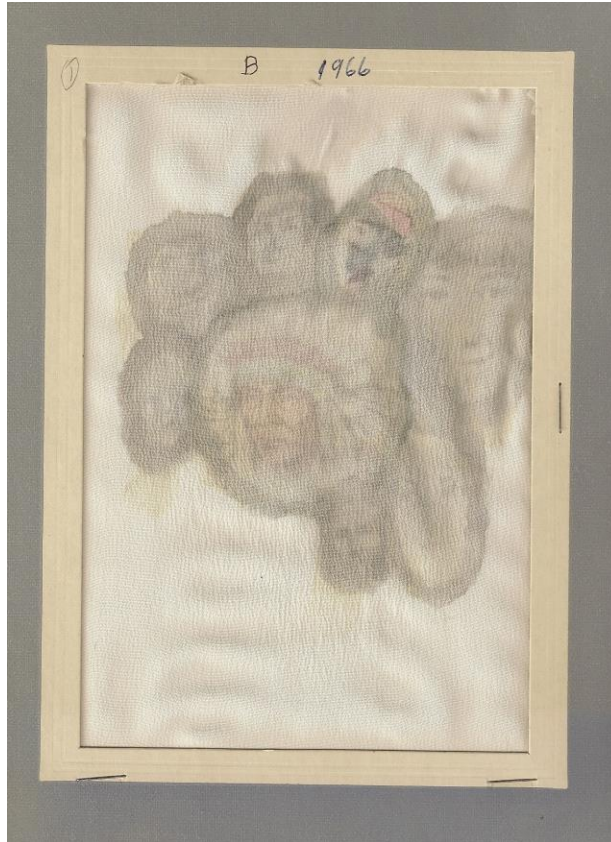




An example of a precipitated “skotographs” by Rev. Charles Swann, 1966 and 1967. Photo courtesy of Hett Art Gallery and Museum, Camp Chesterfield.



Precipitated spirit portraits on silk, by Rev. Charles Swann, 1965. Photo courtesy of Hett Art Gallery and Museum, Camp Chesterfield.



Precipitated spirit portraits on silk, by Rev. Charles Swann, 1966. Photo courtesy of *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.



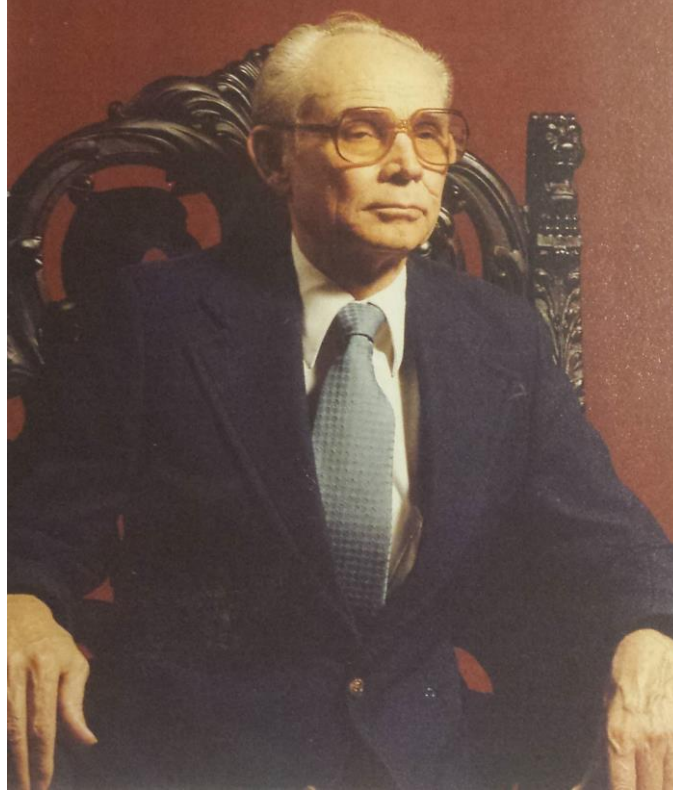
Pauline Swann, wife of Rev. Charles Swann; circa 1950. Photo courtesy of *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.



Rev. Charles Swann. Circa 1960s. Photo courtesy of *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.



Rev. Charles Swann (far right); September 1971; Ordination ceremony. [Far left, Rev. Clifford Bias.] Photo courtesy of *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.



Rev. Charles Swann, 1986. Photo courtesy of *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.



Medium's postcard of Rev. Lillian Dee Johnson. Photo courtesy of *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.





The ordination of Rev. Lillian Dee Johnson, Episcopal Spiritualist Church, Michigan. Left to right: Nellie Curry, Dorothy Flexer, Lillian Dee Johnson, John Bunker, Cecil Crannar (?), Clifford Bias; 1946. Photo courtesy of *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.



Rev. Lillian Dee Johnson in the People's Spiritualist Church in St. Petersburg, Florida church. Circa mid-1950s. Photo courtesy of *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.



Left to right: Rev. Penny Umbach, Lamar Keene, Lillian Dee Johnson. This photo is likely the certification (or ordination) of Lamar Keene in the People's Spiritualist Church, St. Petersburg, Florida. Circa mid-1950s. Photo courtesy of *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*.

## **Appendix B: A Description of Spirit Photography as Done by Rev. Charlie Swann**

Charles Swann of Camp Chesterfield was an extraordinary physical medium that was able to demonstrate what is referred to as “psychic photography” where photographs from the spiritual realm were revealed during red-light séances (only red-light is used). The following is a description of this type of phenomena made by Ralph Hicock, who on August 26, 1955 participated in a special demonstration séance for spirit photography under test conditions. This article appeared in the *Psychic Observer*, No. 413 in the November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1955 issue as a front-page story (continuing onto page 2).

### **Spirit Photography Without Benefit of Camera Through the Mediumship of Charles Swann**

**By Ralph Hicock**

2238 7<sup>th</sup> St., North, St. Petersburg, Florida

**Special Demonstrations are scheduled to be held in  
Florida during the next several months**

August 26<sup>th</sup>, last, this reporter, along with twenty-seven students of the Spiritualist Episcopal Institute, attended a most fascinating séance at Camp Chesterfield, Indiana. It was held in the home of Charles Swann, a medium noted for Spirit Pictures on Silk by Precipitation.

The object of this séance was to witness a demonstration of Spirit Photography without any camera being employed in the process. The séance was conducted throughout in a manner that would, in the estimation of all who attended, preclude any element of fraud.

Those who have met Mr. Swann, or have been fortunate enough to attend his séances, know him as a most personable young man, sincere in his efforts to bring to the individual the truth that loved ones can and do survive the change called death.

I found this student body comprised a cross-section of various educational and scientific vocations, and came from as far as California, New York, and Florida.

Mr. Swann's only “assistants” in this demonstration consisted of a small red light, 3 shallow pans placed on a small table in the center of the room which held the chemicals necessary for development of the film which, at no time, left the room or were withheld from the view of the one to whom it had been given

#### **Arduous Task**

A package of sealed Kodak #F2 photographic paper was inspected and opened by one of the student members, after which the room was darkened except for a small red light which established the fact that, at all times, the sitters were in their seats except the medium who could plainly be seen going from one to the other, giving to each one a film.

We previously had been briefed on the “modus operandi” of this exceptional and exciting phase of mediumship and had practiced writing our name on the back of a blank sheet of paper while holding it to the solar plexus. The name was for the purpose of identification. Mr. Swann demonstrated what would happen to film exposed to the light. Placing it in the developing pan, the paper came out a complete blank, ruined by the exposure to light.

Repeating the Lord’s Prayer in unison and each one holding their film to the solar plexus, we were told to stand; inhale, hold, and exhale—which reminded me of the technique used in India, and which so many of us have experienced—and then told to concentrate on our loved ones on the other side of Life.

And then began a most arduous task—for it seemed—to demonstrate this marvelous law in its unfoldment [sic] and to process each film, taking each one of the twenty-eight in their turn.

Calling each one to the table, the medium placed his left hand **over** the hand of the individual holding the film to their solar plexus. Mr. Swann’s right hand held aloft in the red light which brought into clear focus all details and fixtures in the room; the table and developing pans could be seen clearly.

### **Under Red Light**

As the medium made contact with the hand under, which lay the film, his slender frame seemed shaken somewhat violently as though he had touched uninsulated [sic] electric voltage. This lasted for an average of about ten seconds, after which the medium requested the holder of the film to drop it into the pan holding the developing chemical.

Passing the red light slowly over the pan to and fro he told each one to see and note the changes taking place upon the film. And changes there surely were...first, small dark spots, tremulous with a promise and a hope, and then, clearly and more clearly, expanding, growing, came the shadowy outline of a face! Harper and clearer it became until an exclamation of joy, of bewilderment, of awe and wonderment thrilled the sitters.

There, before our eyes, was the recognizable features, the personality, and memory brought to Life again, of one whom they KNEW to be the very one who had walked by their side; one who had known the joys and heartaches of Life in its fulfillment.

Twenty-eight people stepped up to that little table, and twenty-eight times this procedure was repeated as hearts were gladdened and hopes realized. Time or space will not permit relating the reactions and statements of all who received satisfactory—to them—conclusive evidence of survival at this séance.

A Mrs. May Hoagland of 24925 21<sup>st</sup> Ave., North, St. Petersburg, Florida, stated irrevocably that her film had upon it the unmistakable faces of: her Grandmother Betty, Grandfather McWorter, a nephew, Dan McWorter—recently killed in a “Flying Box-car” plane crash in Germany.



Melton Heim, Fulton, N.Y., stated that upon his piece of film were the unmistakable features of: Dr. Weber, his Mother, Sister Mary, Aunt Francis, an Uncle Tony, a brother Joseph, a Red Cross Nurse, Rev. Wallace, and White Feather, an Indian Guide.

### **Truth Stranger...**

James McEwen, who resides at 53 Woodworth Ave., Buffalo, N.Y., stated he recognized the features of: a Sister Lucy, a Dr. Burns, a daughter Eleanor, his father, two Indian guides named Running-Fox and Tall Pine. To this reporter it did not come as a complete surprise when he found the dear faces of his beloved Mother, Father, and Aunt, upon his film. On a previous visit to Mr. Swann, he had received on silk the precipitated duplicate of a photograph of a Great-Grandfather whom he had never seen, but whose picture he has always possessed; the only difference between the two being the one on silk has upon its features a most welcome and happy smile.

And so it was the truth, through natural Law of God, was presented to this student body in a marvelous demonstration of spirit photography without benefit of camera.

Perhaps it seems strange to some that Truth can be stranger than fiction; but also strange is the fact that some cannot accept that Truth unless it is robed in the habiliments of their own particular selection, while Truth in any garb, wherever found, should be welcomed by us all.

Having enjoyed many "personalized" experiences in the field of Spiritualism, this reporter finds it difficult to reconcile the name "skeptic" with an intelligent and rightful description of one who is unwilling to gaze into the microscope of patient and un-biased understanding, putting to intelligent usage the working tools of his mind, a God-given moral and intellectual unity of mind given him to seek out these Truths.

If nothing will induce then to accept the spirit hypothesis of this demonstration of survival and identity, which I state most emphatically and sincerely was received through the mediumship of Mr. Swann, then at least they must admit that some higher force and intelligence is accountable for the phenomena; and that there **is** something beyond the material world as we know it.

For myself, it seems less absurd and less feasible to ascribe this phenomena to spirit agency than to attempt to explain them away by attributing them to the activities of the medium's subconscious. The latter hypothesis is entirely unsound in principle and has absolutely no basis in fact.

[Hicock, Ralph (1955) *Psychic Observer: Spiritualism's Pictorial Journal*. "Spirit Photography Without Benefit of Camera: Through the Mediumship of Charles Swann." Jamestown, N.Y. and Chesterfield, Indiana: No. 413, November 25, 1955; pp 1-2.]

## **Appendix C: A Description of Precipitated Silk Spirit Portraits as Done By Charles Swann**

Charles Swann was well known for physical phenomena during his many decades as a medium at Camp Chesterfield. One of his many gifts was the ability to manifest spirit portraits on cloth, often times referred to as “pictures on silk.” This demonstration of physical phenomena was documented in a front-page article of the *Psychic Observer*, June 10, 1955 by Dr. Enid S. Smith who attended a séance at Camp Chesterfield where the precipitated pictures on silk séance took place. The following is his account of the séance:

### **A Precipitated Séance Pictures on Silk By Dr. Enid S. Smith**

Last summer, in the basement of the Swann cottage, at Chesterfield Spiritualist Camp, Chesterfield, Indiana, a laboratory class of eleven people met to watch an experiment—the production of spirit pictures on squares of silk. The medium was Rev. Charles Swann.

R.G. Pressing, editor of the **Psychic Observer**, introduced the guest of honor, Dr. Kohei Ando, of the Faculty of Engineering, of Osaka University, Osaka, Japan. Others present from Philadelphia, Chicago, New York and elsewhere: William G. Ramey, Rose Gawne, Dr. Hayes D. Dick, Marguerite Bukhe, James Bowling, Toni Lantermann, Connie Shesler, and myself.

The séance, to the surprise of many present, consisted of different types of phenomena other than the pictures on silk—such as various shapes of light and luminous vapors, scents, tastes, and clairvoyant messages.

The class was seated at one side and at the end of a long table, covered with white cloth, in the center of which had been placed small squares of white silk, small bottles of ink, and numerous colored pencils.

Then Mr. Swann explained what phenomena he hoped to obtain. Nobody ever knows. It could be possible that nothing would occur.

The pieces of silk were examined by some present, as Mr. Swann continued to explain that the squares, about 5 x 7 inches, were a combination of silk and rayon, and that sometimes they had received dozens of pictures on one little square all intricately executed—some of the faces and forms, those usually of the Masters and Indians in color.

#### **Pictures Precipitated**

Others, relatives and friends, were in black and white, very often with wide black borders around the faces, which if not understood give the effect of beards to some of the girls—the black is to separate the pictures one from another.

Often times after the precipitations are examined and put away, perhaps for months, when taken out again, there will appear additional pictures on the silk. The writer has found such on hers from time to time. Sometimes there are animals, sometimes buildings, also scenes that appear, as well as faces and forms of different sizes, some three inches long, others less than a quarter of an inch.

The faces and dress, in most instances, are executed in every detail of perfection, and when we consider that hundreds of these pictures are precipitated in a few minutes, one is inclined to count it a miracle.

### **Seen Clairvoyantly**

Further introductory explanations brought out the fact that, if there were to be nay results, the little pile of silk squares in the center of the long table would have to be magnetized. If a light did not appear over the silk, there would be no results.

The séance was to be partly in the red light (by means of a small light bulb attached to a cord held in the medium's hand), and partly in the dark. If members of the class saw lights, scented various smells or experienced different kinds of tastes, they had permission to speak of such and to note if others shared these same sensations with them.

The lights were turned out. All repeated the Lord's Prayer and sang a stanza of the hymn, "I came to the Garden Alone." From time to time the medium continued his explanation and voiced what he saw clairvoyantly for members of the class.

For example, standing beside Dr. Ando he saw a man, an Oriental, a Japanese, with black hair and a small mustache. A bowl of rice was held over the Professor's head.

Gain, Swann said, "I see your brother here, addressing his remarks to one of the class—his name is Joe." This was correct and also the description that followed. The writer was told at one time an Oriental stood beside her with outstretched arms holding in his hands above her head two bowls of rice.

### **Rare Phenomena**

While this was going on a deep growl, so familiar to the writer in India, was heard on the opposite side of the table some distance from where the medium stood. This was Nemo, the black panther that had materialized. He was welcomed by his friends who were acquainted with him in other séances; however, in the past two years he has appeared in the writer's pictures on silk in the Swann séances.

Soon many saw the large, glowing eyes of the animal in front of us. He growled from many parts of the room at various times, and some of us at least scented a typical animal smell. He stayed with us some time while the pieces of silk were being magnetized.

After a few moments, a light appeared over the silk and soon a little man about four inches tall was seen. He ran up and down the very long table with his left hand raised to his head. In several of the séances he has emitted a squeak and has attempted to answer questions more or less unreliably, but this time he squeaked once, at least.

Part of the time he ran very rapidly about a foot above the table on air. He then sprang to the top of the writer's head, and I felt his feet in my hair. He then came down and began work on the pieces of silk.

### **Proper Conditions**

The light extended for three or four inches over the silk, and he seemed to be working this light into the silk with an up and down motion, almost like that of a pump handle. A light vapor surrounded the center of the table, and at times the room radiated a blue vapor; there was also what was taken for much ectoplasm, bars of light, and balls of glowing material as large as oranges. The little dwarf presently ran up the iron post at the farther end of the table. We could hear his feet as he scampered up and down.

The black panther was still with us, growling now and then to remind us of this fact. His big eyes shone brilliantly. Some of us called him. He ducked his head and came under the table to me, swishing his tail against my right leg; then he walked on. A few minutes later he returned and drew from my lap the brown envelope in which I had note paper and pencils, and dropped it at my feet on the floor.

The medium had instructed us to place the palms of our hands on the edge of the table with fingers up. Since he now felt the silk had been sufficiently magnetized and was ready for work, he placed a piece of it under the hands of each sitter, instructing us to draw our fingers over his hands to transfer some of the power to our special piece of silk and to hold it as he had placed it.

### **Doyle Recognized**

In some of these séances, the little dwarf attempts playfully to twitch the silk from under our hands. Many of the class felt a tingling sensation in the tips of the fingers. We also scented incense, a very beautiful smell. After this we could taste what seemed to be various chemical combinations. There were several remarks to this effect, as the séance continued.

In a few moments, the medium said we would see, with the red light, what results we were getting. He started down at the end of the table with our guest, Dr. Ando, and explained to him what he saw on the professor's piece of silk—among other people was a very good likeness of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, which Mr. Swann said would probably be recognized by certain people in Japan.

Each received some explanation or comment upon his square of silk. Among others that the writer could recognize on hers was her Oriental master, her Indian, her sister, her grandfather, an author among many books with apparently spirit vapor or ectoplasm streaming from heaven, and a picture of a black panther—this time sitting with his head turned to the right, instead of in a springing position, as usual.

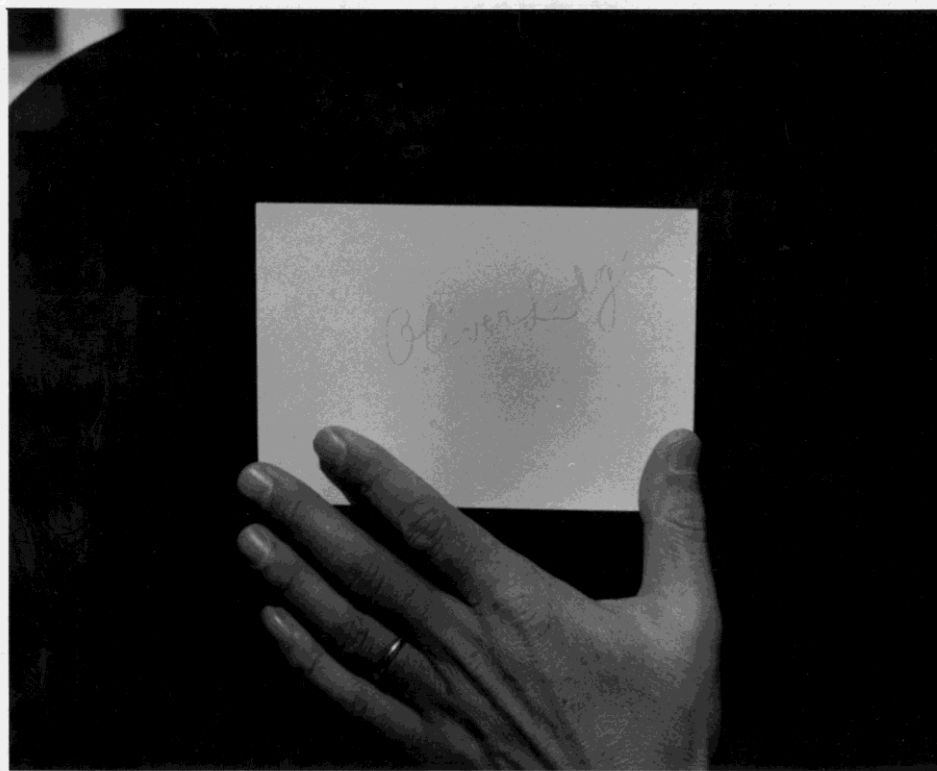
It was explained that the pictures were not quite finished, that we were to roll them up in white paper, fastening them with a rubber band—all of which was provided at the end of the table. We were to keep the pictures in the dark for some 24 hours and then take them into the light and examine them. Thus the séance closed, with each sitter holding his rolled up picture as a small diploma, and with his heart full of gratitude for all the marvels he had experienced.

[Smith, Enid. S. (1955) *Psychic Observer: Spiritualism's Pictorial Journal*. "A Precipitation Séance: Pictures on Silk." Jamestown, N.Y. and Chesterfield, Indiana: No. 402, June 10, 1955; p. 1 and p. 4.]

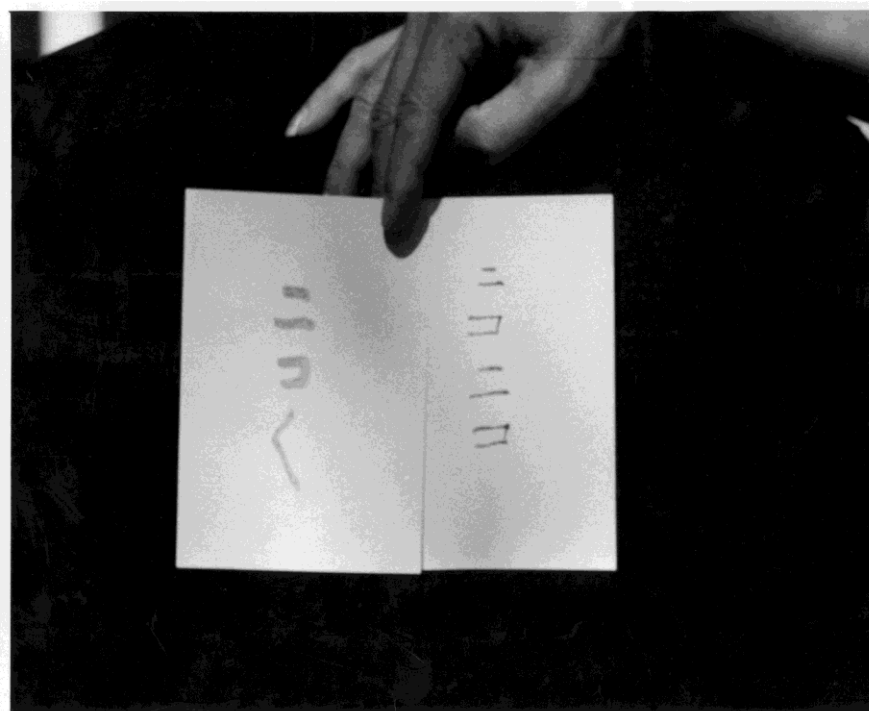
**Nota Bene:** The following photographs are from the *Hett Art Gallery and Museum Archives*, which depict the visit of honored guest and scientific researcher, Dr. Kohei Ando of the Engineering faculty of Osaka University, Japan.

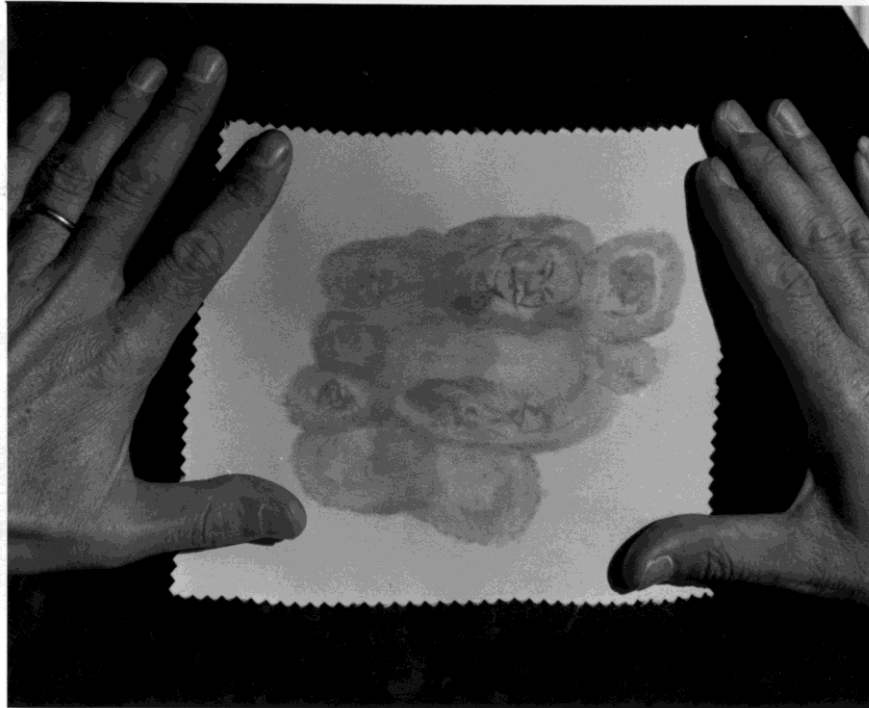


This photo appeared in the *Psychic Observer* with the article: "The photograph above, taken last summer at Chesterfield Spiritualist camp, Chesterfield, Indiana, shows, left to right: Dr. Enid S. Smith, R.G. Pressing, Dr. Kohei Ando, Charles Swann, the medium; Mrs. Charles (Pauline) Swann and son Lee. It is in this séance room that medium Swann conducts his psychic experiments, "Pictures on Silk" during the summer months.



Dr. Kohei Ando received a spirit card with the name of famed Spiritualist "Sir Oliver Lodge."  
Photo courtesy of *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.





Dr. Kohei Ando with a skotograph (spirit photograph) of Japanese Katakana and Hiragana characters (top photo) and a spirit picture on silk (bottom photo). Photos courtesy of *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.



Dr. Kohei Ando with Camp Chesterfield medium, Loretta Schmidt. He received a spirit card of a guide and an apport. Note the trumpets sitting in front of the table. Photo courtesy of *Hett Art Gallery and Museum*, Camp Chesterfield.